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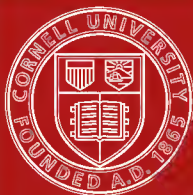
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No. 175

NOT COUNTING THE COST



# NOT COUNTING THE COST

BY

TASMA

AUTHOR OF UNCLE PIPER OF PIPER'S HILL,  
IN HER EARLIER YOUTH, ETC.

"A Friend loveth at all times, and a brother  
is born for adversity"      PROVERBS



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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
1895

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# NOT COUNTING THE COST.

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## PART I.

### INTRODUCTION.

A GREAT paddock, full of scattered haycocks, sloping down to a rough mountain road that leads in its turn through straggling outskirts to a town lying in a hollow. Beyond the town, the shining, sparkling waters of a broad blue harbour, hedged round by purple mountains. The bright summer air of Christmas week at the Antipodes resting upon the scene; and such a radiance of light shed over it by the afternoon sun that no human eye can gaze upon it unblinking for long. This is the setting in which the town of Hobart, the capital of the far Southern island of Tasmania, lies between the mountains and the sea. The sloping hay-paddock, with the cottage above it, whence a full view of the sparkling harbour below and of mighty Mount Wellington on high—solemn guardian of the town—may be best obtained, is the home of the Clare family, residents of Cowa, a rambling property perched on the flanks of one of the abrupt hills clustered round Mount Wellington as children cluster round the knees of their father.

When we see it first, the paddock is not left to the undisturbed possession of its haycocks. A tribe of young people, varying from the irresponsible age of the units to that of full-fledged teens, are running wild over it in the most literal sense of the term. With shrieks and jumps they bound into the haycocks and out of them, like so many men of Thesaly in the legendary quickset hedge, their hair and their clothes so stuck over with straw, so generally tumbled and dishevelled and tousled, that at a first glance you would take

them for a tribe of juvenile gipsies. A second glance might not entirely correct the first impression, for on a closer inspection an undeniable strain of gipsy blood does actually betray itself in the swarthy colouring of the black-haired lad of some nine or ten who has just landed head foremost in a hay-mound. And a similar suspicion would suggest itself in connection with the rich colouring of the very young girl hard by, apparently about fourteen or fifteen, who is pantingly engaged in twisting up with both hands an escaped coil of magnificent dark hair, that a moment ago lay gleaming with snake-like undulations on her back. The peculiar dusky darkness of the eyes, a certain heavy-lidded, thick-lashed environment of them, recall dim visions of Lalla Rookhs or Brides of Abydos to those who observe them closely; and there is a certain untamed suppleness and elasticity, more Oriental than English, in the young girl's movements as well. Her face is very much flushed, but the nape of the neck, which is exposed to view as she twists the captured coil into a crown on the summit of her small head, displays an ivory skin—not dead white, but faintly golden, with amber reflections in the sunlight. The rusty-headed little girl—a mere five-year-old morsel this, of transient sensations and emotions—that clings round her knees and clamours to be taken on her back, is evidently her sister, yet the different character of this small being's face is already clearly defined. Her eyes, that have not yet lost their native look of baby wonderment, yellow-brown in hue, with ambulant, rust-coloured specks floating in the iris, have individual potentialities of their own. If there is gipsy blood here, it is less evident than in the case of the elder sister.

The swarthy-cheeked boy is not allowed to stand on his head for long. A little girl, apparently about his own age, with an odd resemblance to him in build and feature—all the odder that, where he is dark and sun-burned, she is fair and sunburned—has run against his legs and thrust him over with a vigorous push; for an instant he lies kicking and indignant on his back in the straw, then, springing to his feet, turns upon her with his dark eyes aflame.

“What did you do that for?” he cries angrily; but see-

ing who it is, his voice grows milder. "You shouldn't, Mamy; I'd just counted up to ten, when you came and spoiled it all."

"It's a stupid game!" said Mamy, the fair little girl; "only one can play at it. Let's race bundles, Dick; Eila can pack us up."

"All right, then," assented the boy; "only we must begin at the top, you know, and start fair, mind."

"I always start fair!" said Mamy indignantly. "I wait all through 'Bell-horses,' till it comes to 'One, two, three and away,' and I don't begin till it's '*away*!'"

Mamy was toiling after her brother up the hill as she uttered this protest. Arrived at the summit, the two children tumbled into a sitting posture under a giant elderberry hedge, whence they proceeded to send down loud and imperative "cooees" to their elder sister below, with a summons to come and make them up into hay-bundles that minute.

"S'posing we got some strawberries first," said Dick, the boy.

"No," replied Mamy; "it's nicer"—I'm afraid she said "ith nither," for she kept her lisp almost as long as she wore short frocks—"to eat them when we've done. I don't know why it's always nicer to wait for things."

"It isn't always nicer," was Dick's prompt answer. "If you've got to wait too long, you don't care about them in the end."

"Well, there's just a nice time to wait—I mean, till you want them very badly," said Mamy argumentatively. Abstract arguments were as the salt of life to every member of the Clare family with one exception from the cradle upwards. "I wish Eila would hurry up!" she continued; "I see Willie coming up the road down there with a great horrid boy, and we can't enjoy ourselves one bit now."

"He won't matter to you," said Dick stolidly. "We needn't take any notice of him;" and the "cooees" were reiterated with renewed energy, and a carrying power worthy of an Australian black fellow himself.

"I'm coming, you little monkeys!" cried a breathless

voice from below ; " you needn't bring the neighbourhood together with your 'cooees.' " And Eila, with the rusty-haired little one clinging crablike to her back, and squeezing her neck in a childish and merciless grasp, was seen tugging bravely up over the yellow stubble, which is not pleasant walking at the best of times—less than ever when one is handicapped by a burden from behind, apparently bent upon pulling a body over backwards.

When she had reached the summit of the hill, Eila freed her neck from the encircling grasp of the childish fingers, and gravely mopped her forehead with her handkerchief.

" I'm streaming," she said shortly. " Truca, you're really getting too heavy to be carried about, you know ; it's cruelty to animals, that's what it is. Well, what do you children want ? I can't do anything till I've had a rest."

Then, shaking off the little one, who slid down cool and triumphant upon her feet, she flung herself down upon the grassy soil and fanned herself with her hat.

" Make us into bundles," clamoured Dick and Mamy together ; " we're goin' to have a bundle-race."

" Then you must get the hay. You don't suppose I'm going after the hay for you, do you ? "

The words were tart, but the voice was honey itself. To be " fetch and carry " to the little ones of the family had seemed such a sweet and natural function to Eila Clare from the first moment that the marvellous and heavenly gift of a twin baby brother and sister had been conferred upon her in her childish days, that she never thought of revolting at their commands. Only of late years their authority had been weakened by the advent of the latest comer, Trucaninni, otherwise Truca, who actually wielded the sceptre of she-who-must-be-obeyed in the family.

Dick grumbled, as also did Mamy, but they went to collect the hay, nevertheless. The operation was assisted, or rather impeded, by Truca, who plodded after them and scattered the bundles they had collected in her attempts to appropriate an armful for herself. She was rewarded by being told that she was a " big girl " and a " little duck,"

and marched proudly with her wisps at the head of the procession.

The hay being supplied, Dick and Mamy stretched themselves upon it on the ground, side by side, each upon a separate bundle. By dint of rolling their bodies round in it, and with the assistance of their elder sister, who twisted the hay about them with a deftness that spoke of long practice, they were speedily reduced to the appearance of two straw-covered champagne bottles. Which end was head and which feet it would have been difficult, however, to decide. The two bundles lay long and compact at the top of the steep hill, waiting for the signal which was to start them rolling downwards to the bottom. How these living bundles contrived to breathe was a problem. It is to be surmised that the space between the wisps allowed for the ingress of a certain amount of air.

There was a long moment of suspense, during which Eila busied herself in pulling and pushing the bundles into as exact a line as the inequalities of the soil would allow. She had a threefold office to fulfil, to wit, that of judge, of starter, and of umpire—a grave responsibility, with competitors so captiously critical as her younger brother and sister. The bundles lay quite still while they were being placed, and when this task was accomplished, Eila knelt between them, and began to repeat with a chanting intonation the words:

“ Bell-horses, bell-horses, what time of day ;  
One o'clock, two o'clock, three and ——”

but before the word “away” had crossed her lips the bundles, which had been already quivering with impatience, gave a simultaneous convulsive jerk and began to roll away down the incline like the cheeses in Grimm's tales. It was giddy work to watch them revolving from the top of the hill. Over they went, bumping and jolting on their downward course, with an occasional rebound where the soil took a sudden steepness, or when some unexpected descent had given them a fresh impetus.

To Eila's horror (she had been laughing heartily at their first set-off), their twisting and twirling progress showed no

sign of coming to a standstill, even after they had reached the stretch of level ground that lay at the bottom of the pad-dock. This comparatively level space terminated in an abrupt precipice, unprotected by fence or hedge of any kind. Below it, at a drop of some eight or ten feet, was the rocky road leading into the town. Now, it was not until the bundles had rolled themselves to within two or three feet of the aforesaid precipice that the contents thereof seemed to think it worth while to slacken their speed.

Seen from above, the aspect was anything but reassuring. Eila, unmindful for once of the protesting bawls of Truca, who threw herself on her face on the ground and kicked her fat legs in speechless fury at being left behind, set off running at her topmost speed down the hill.

Despite the beautiful legend of Atalanta and the exquisite embodiments of it that artists have painted, the human form does not lend itself to the exercise of rapid running with the same natural grace as is displayed by any fourfooted creature of the forest. Nevertheless, in the reckless course of the young girl down the abrupt decline, there was a freedom of movement that possessed an undeniable grace. Without comparing her to a stag or a fawn, it might have been said that her pace had the spring and elasticity of one of her own native kangaroos, an animal which, as we all know, will hop and bound with such a human air that the Australian natives will mimic its movements in their turn, and succeed in reproducing them as though to the manner born. Once Eila had begun to run down the breakneck declivity, there could be no thought of stopping until she reached the bottom. She did so only just in time to see the two bundles come to a standstill at a nicely-calculated (though blood-curdling-in-its-proximity) distance, as the Germans would say, from the edge of the aforementioned precipice. The bodies within were observed slowly to kick and writhe in the effort to free themselves of their encircling wrappings of hay, like huge chrysalides seeking to emerge from the grub stage of their attire. The first choked words uttered by both together came from them in hoarse gasps. The words were, "Who won?"



Eila had come up to them by this time, and was panting too, though more from emotion than fatigue. To anyone less accustomed than she to the order of Cowa pastimes, the twins would have appeared pitiable objects indeed. Their faces were almost unrecognisable, swollen and bloated with a heat past description. Wet strands of hair clung round their foreheads and necks. Their entire persons were stuck over with tags and jags of dried grass, wisps of straw, trails of dead weeds, brambles and clots of earth. Their eyes were bloodshot, and as they feebly plucked away the hay bandages, sitting upright on the ground, they wriggled under the pain inflicted by the straws on the unprotected parts of their bodies.

Mamy was the first to recover her voice. She spoke wheezily, and, between sneezing and lisping, would not have made herself understood to any but a long-practised member of the family.

"Wathn't it a good race?" she gasped enthusiastically. "It wath neck and neck"—sneeze, sneeze—"I don't believe we ever had such a good one in all our lives! And I'm sure I won, too. I didn't only stop till I was right close up to the edge."

"No, you didn't win, then!" croaked Dick hoarsely, sneezing in his turn. "Why, you came bump up against me from behind, so that shows I was on in front. My word, but these straws are a caution! I believe I've got one in my eye, for I can't open it one bit. I say, Eila, you're umpire"—blinking up at her eagerly—"didn't I win the race now, say?"

"I don't care who won; you're little wretches, both!" said Eila, with a half-sob in her voice; for she had been really frightened this time. "I'll never do you up again either, so there! What did you go near the edge for like that? Don't you know that in one minute more you'd have been over the precipice, and both your necks broken!"

The children were silent for a moment. Then they looked at each other and laughed, and Dick said:

"Don't fluff, Eila; I always know just when I've got to stop, and Mamy, too."

"It's the last time I'll have a hand in it, anyhow!" declared Eila.

Mamy meanwhile had been shaking and pluming herself into some semblance of her former round-limbed self. Now she said reflectively:

"I s'pose breaking necks doesn't hurt too awfully much. If Dick's and mine was broken together it would be nicer for us than going up to heaven alone."

"Nonsense!" said her sister; "you needn't think of going to heaven yet, either alone or in company, Mamy." For to guard the younger ones against the intrusion of the terrifying apprehension of death had been Eila's constant care ever since she had stood, a little creature of ten, by the side of her father's dead body, and the first awful dawning consciousness of the black chasm that yawns before and behind us had well-nigh crushed her under its weight. "You've got to go on doing lots of happy things till you're an old woman, and then there'll be newer and better things to do up above."

"I don't care," said Mamy, her voice trembling, and this time it was not from the straw-dust she had swallowed. "I won't ever care to go by myself. I don't think it's at all a good arrangement. I'd like you, and mother, and Dick, and me, and all of us, to have a big fiery chariot like Elijah's to go right up to heaven in together. I'd like it to be just like Mrs. Warden's double-seated buggy; then there'd be plenty of room—only not too hot, or we might all get burned."

"I don't want to go to heaven, anyhow," observed Dick; he was lying upon his back looking up at the blue mist overhead. "I don't want to go anywhere. I wish I'd never been made at all."

"Oh, Dick dear! why do you say that?" said his elder sister reproachfully. "I'm sure you have a good time of it nearly always."

"No, I don't—not when I'm thinking!" retorted Dick. "I think, and I think, and I wonder how the world's going to be stopped. I don't want it to go on always. I can't bear to think of things going on always. It makes me hate to be alive at all. I do wish people hadn't got to be born."

"Dear!" said Eila soothingly, and she stooped to pass her

soft sunburnt hand through the lad's damp hair. "I used to have just that kind of feeling; it used nearly to drive me mad; and now I know the only thing to do is to say this: "We haven't got brains to understand the puzzle now. Perhaps we may have a different kind of brain some day—somewhere—in some other world." That's the best to hope for. And in the meantime, there's so much else to think about here; one keeps finding out nice, new, interesting things every day."

Dick grunted, but whether in assent or dissent his sister could not say. The metaphysical turn the conversation had threatened to take was brusquely diverted by the advent of two lads of the approved schoolboy type. The one, a year or two younger than Eila, bore the unmistakable Clare stamp. There is nothing more subtle than the quality of family resemblance which is often seen to exist among people who have not a single feature in common. Willie Clare was by common accord a plain boy. He was heavy-featured and thick-lipped, and his eyes lacked the lustrous charm that distinguished his brother's. No one would have bestowed a second look upon Willie, whereas Dick's personality compelled a closer scrutiny. Yet in any part of Hobart where he might present himself, those who had seen either his mother or sisters or brother would say, "You are one of the Clares, I expect," or, "You live up on the hill, don't you?" as the case might be. Willie was, in fact, a kind of joint reproduction of the rest in whatever they possessed of least handsome. Perhaps he had appropriated even a larger share of the very scant stock of practical wisdom they could boast of collectively, for he was the only one who eschewed the metaphysical discussions in which they indulged, from their mother downwards, upon the faintest provocation. Child as he was, he had been able to turn the garden, the hay-paddock, and the live stock of Cowa to account: and while Dick and Mamy were fleeing to the farthest end of the garden or paddock, tearfully and hysterically declaiming against the "bestly cruelty" of "killing the poor darling little baby pigs to eat them," he would stick a juvenile porker with the utmost coolness and neat-handedness, hav-

ing abstained from undertaking the operation until he had thoroughly mastered it in theory, as well as by watching the butcher at work.

The lad who accompanied him was obviously of a different stock. If Nature had not such infinite resources at her command, she would be sorely tasked to give variety to the type of ordinary British or colonial born school-boy between the unpromising ages of ten and fifteen. Willie Clare's companion was so complete an incarnation of the everyday order of sturdy, pugnacious, stolid-looking lad, that you might have supposed you had encountered him a hundred times a day, when you were actually doing so for the first time. He was thick-set; and, notwithstanding the fact that his clothes were infinitely newer and better than those of any member of the Clare family, they were far from setting round him in the same shapely way as theirs. His hair grew low on a square forehead, whence it stood straight up in a kind of rough brush. His gray eyes were not without a lurking spirit of fun in them, though the jaw was heavy and the impression conveyed by the face in repose rather sulky than conciliatory. You would have guessed at once that Sydney Warden was not afflicted by hypersensitiveness, or morbid selfconsciousness, or shocks of perplexed anguish on the score of the mystery of being, as was the case with Dick Clare.

His face wore an interested and amused expression as he watched the progress of the living hay-bundles down the hill while walking by Willie's side along the road below. Though the way from the town was very steep, and the afternoon of the kind familiarly designated as blazing hot, both boys quickened their speed as they neared the paddock, spurred on by their sympathy for the sport that was going on there. A few rough blocks of stone at the corner served as stepping-stones, by which they were enabled to climb into it, and, once arrived, they hurried on towards the scene of action.

The party grouped at the bottom of the paddock took, however, but little notice of them. Dick and Mamy had been cooling themselves, and talking about heaven. More-

over, Mamy's attitude towards strange boys was capricious. She was so completely Dick's double in everything that she felt it as a bitter grievance when he played by himself with some school-companion of Willie's who had come to spend the afternoon at Cowa without inviting her to share in the game. Admitted to take part in the sport (and there were few boys' games in which Mamy could not hold her own), she was not averse to the occasional society of her brothers' friends. But her preference was for big boys, not for short ones, and whether because Sydney's legs were not long enough to allow of his being included in the former category, or that Mamy, besides being a romp, was also a premature coquette, and wanted to attract the newcomer's attention, it is certain that as Sydney approached she looked studiously in another direction, even turning her back upon him, and feigning to have no more absorbing interest in life than the picking out of the grass-seeds that had stuck fast in her socks.

Eila's demeanour was quite different. She could behave upon occasion like a big, grown-up person, as the children called it—though her romping powers were almost equal to theirs—and upon seeing that the new arrival looked awkward and shy, she put him at his ease by the friendly way in which she shook hands with him and made him welcome to Cowa.

"I know you are Sydney Warden," she said; "Willie told us you would perhaps come back with him some afternoon. But it must have been dreadfully hot walking up from town. We'll go and get some strawberries, or do you like strawberries and cream better? We have them out here in the hay, and it's such fun. Did you see the great bundle-race from below?"

Sydney said "Yes" in a tongue-tied kind of way, and stared helplessly across at the competitors sitting in the hay. They still looked as though they had been dragged at a cart's tail, like criminals in olden times, though their expressions were serene. Dick nodded condescendingly; Mamy continued to pick the grass-seeds from her socks, until her brother gave her a sideway nudge.

"Don't show off, Mamy!" he whispered; "it's silly. You know somebody's there."

"I'm not showing off," said Mamy indignantly. "I've got my own business to attend to."

And attend to it she did, without any sign of relenting. She took off her shoe, shook out the straws, examined it closely, then put it on again, and subjected her second shoe to the same treatment, keeping her bright covered head obstinately bent down the whole time, resolutely ignoring the presence of outsiders. Only once she cast a sideways glance at the stranger boy. She lowered her eyes again, however, immediately. There was a gleam of mocking merriment in them.

"I wish you two would have a race again!" said Sydney to Dick, after the first antagonistic shyness had worn off; "it's the best lark in the world to see you spinning round and round. Only you ought to begin right up at the top, where that little girl's screeching over there."

"It's poor dear little Truc!" said Eila, with self-reproach; and "Eila's coming, darling!" she shouted, as she sprang up the paddock towards her tyrant.

Mamy had condescended to raise her head by this time, and to display her defiant and tumbled little visage, and Dick asked her whether she was "on" for another race. Divided between the fear of being left out of the game, and a certain reluctance to give her consent too cheaply, she sought to compromise matters by suggesting that "the boy" and Willie should have a first turn. By some unexplained caprice, she continued to ignore Sydney's presence, only alluding to him loftily as "the boy," while she addressed herself ostentatiously to Dick.

"We'll have a four-bundle race! That'll be better fun!" urged Willie; for Sydney, upon whose not otherwise lively imagination the attractive novelty of the entertainment had exercised an irresistible and all-powerful fascination, willingly agreed, and the four children plodded in company up the steep, prickly, slippery stubble, only stopping occasionally to roll over a haycock, or to chase each other round it, before tumbling breathless into the midst.

The scene around them was such as might have gladdened the heart of a painter, but none of the children thought of directing their observation to it. They had been born under the shadow of Mount Wellington, and consulted him now more as a kind of huge weather-glass than from any æsthetic appreciation of his venerable beauties. According to the aspect he wore in the morning, they built their hopes upon the day before them. When he appeared arrayed, like a monarch, in royal purple, with his giant crown well outlined against the shining expanse of blue that canopied him, they felt that the heavens would smile upon them. When, on the other hand, he sulked behind the cloud-wreaths, or showed himself grudgingly under rags and tags of wet mist, they got out their umbrellas and waterproofs. For what other motive should the Tasmanians to-day question him? He has no legends of mediæval days to recount, though, for all we know to the contrary, he may have a thousand tales as wonderful and dramatic as any of these locked up in his gloomy fastnesses. He has seen a primitive race swept from the face of the earth, goaded convicts hiding like rats in holes and caves, and runaway prisoners hunted to their doom. He has seen fugitives, lost in his mysterious hollows, wander round and round in delirious circles, until they have fallen to rise no more. He has witnessed many an act of life's comedy played out besides, unknown to all. He has seen flirtations, and proposals, and betrothals—episodes less easy than these to put into words, though French romance writers do not hesitate to fill long chapters about them. He knows more secrets than many a human father confessor, though he keeps his counsel, like a grim old guardian of public interests that he is. An occasional hint concerning the weather is all that can be extorted from him to-day. He has outlived his own boiling, seething youth, as may be seen by the scars he bears on his surface, and knows that men are but as the grass that springs up in the night-time, and is cut down in the morning.

To-day, like an ancient patriarch who sees his children playing at his feet, Mount Wellington wore a benignant smile. Unconsciously to themselves, he was an element of



happiness in the lives of the inmates of Cowa. Upon July days they had seen him robed to his base in a surplice of sparkling snow. There were summer sunsets in January when he glowed like a huge ruby. His normal hue ranged from cold gray to warm purple. Upon the days when he was hidden altogether the children were ill at ease. It was as though a dark shadow had suddenly descended on their lives.

Race number two required longer inaugural ceremonies than the first. To begin with, Eila, who had retracted her threat never to do up the culprits again, upon the condition that the bundles should start themselves after she had been given time to get to the bottom of the hill with Truca, and to await them there, had had four packages instead of two to make up. She felt some compunction in packing up Sydney Warden. It was evident that his mother bestowed much thought and money upon his clothes. Then there was the whole descent to accomplish for a second time, with Truca triumphantly reinstated on her back, clinging vengefully this time like a miniature Old Man of the Sea. Dick, it was arranged, should give the signal from under his swathings of hay; but, just as Eila had anticipated, he gave it long before she had reached the bottom with her load, notwithstanding the fact that she had galloped—as far as a two-legged beast of burden may be said to gallop—as fast as ever she was able. She was fain now to skip out of the way of the irregularly rolling bundles as they revolved rapidly past her; worse still, she was subjected, as before, to a spasm of terror on behalf of the foremost of the lot, which could be none other than the twins. This time the victory rested between Dick and the new-comer, who were in an equally sorry plight as they emerged from their wrappings. Each, however, loudly proclaimed himself the winner; and when Eila reached the scene, and Willie and Mamy were able to perceive what was going on with their smarting eyes, it had already come to a tussle between the two disputants, in which each was trying to convince the other that he was in point of fact the winner by the illogical argument of pulling him over to the ground.

The tussle was mere sport at first—the kind of wrestling-match in which boys, like young puppies, engage almost instinctively, and without malice prepense, upon the shallowest pretexts; but it grew more earnest as each of the combatants discovered that he had met his match. Dick was lithe and sinewy; he seemed to have indiarubber springs in his body, which made it impossible to throw him right over. Sydney, for his part, had weight and muscle. In vain Dick twisted round his adversary's body, like a supple panther springing upon a bear. Sydney opposed a dead-weight resistance to all the efforts of his adversary. The combat had lasted nearly two minutes—a long time when it is considered that the parties engaged in it were well-nigh breathless at the outset; and Willie advised them to desist. "Stop that!" he called out, with the assertion that Sydney had won the race in any case. Dick felt that he could not hold out any longer. He was on the point of sinking under Sydney's weight, when Mamy, who had been watching the struggle with dilated eyes and quivering lips, suddenly and unexpectedly interposed. Snatching up the first missile to hand in the shape of a potato that had probably been dropped from some sack in the haycart, she flung it with all her might at Sydney's head. He saw the gesture, and ducked in time to elude it. But Dick had meanwhile taken advantage of the unguarded movement, with a sudden dexterous twist of the foot, to throw his adversary off his balance and cause him to topple over backwards on the ground. Dick went over himself, it is true, clasped in his enemy's arms; but he had the satisfaction, at least, of being the topmost. Upon seeing this Mamy stalked away, rejoiced and impenitent, hurling over her shoulder the parting taunt: "I knew Dick wasn't going to be beaten, 'cause he won the race."

The boys picked themselves up none the worse friends in the end, and no allusion was made to the episode of the potato. Curiously enough, however, the vision of Mamy with her arm uplifted, in the act of hurling, the straw sticking all over her head and clothes, was destined to remain fixed for evermore in Sydney's mind. He was entirely unaware of

the fact at the time. Have we not all a store of mental photographs which seem to have recorded themselves on our brains with no connivance or volition of our own? Perhaps there are moods during which the mind is like a sensitive plate, so that impressions recorded on it are never to be subsequently effaced. Many things happened at Cowa that day which Sydney also remembered, for this was the first of numberless visits he paid his friends on the hill. For one thing, he remembered that Mamy had disappeared for a very long time. Rude little girl as she was, the play had not seemed quite so interesting when her eager, watchful eyes, blue as the agate in Sydney's pockets, under her tousled hair, had been no longer there to follow the games.

When she returned Sydney would hardly have recognised her. She wore a clean holland blouse fastened round her waist with a belt. Her face was washed and seemed to be very fair, and her hair, without a particle of straw in it, hung in a stout, short plait behind her back, tied at the end with a strip of blue ribbon. She looked quite good, and carried something that appeared like a white soup-tureen carefully in both hands, with soup-plates and spoons on the top of it. Upon being uncovered, the soup-tureen was found to contain piles of luscious strawberries swimming in the thickest and yellowest of cream, all properly sugared and mixed. In Sydney's own home there was a professional cook, who made such curries and such trifles as no one in Hobart could approach. Yet it seemed to him now that all he had eaten hitherto at his mother's table was but as Dead Sea fruit, compared with the nectar and ambrosia of that first repast in the hay at Cowa. It was Eila who dispensed it, sitting on the haycock with Truca on her lap, and there was more than anyone could eat at a time. The children had to get up and jump about before they could finish what was left.

Then Eila told them a story in the hay, while they lay on their backs and stomachs in a state of blissful contentment that passed all description. Only yesterday Sydney would have scorned such a babyish amusement as that of listening to a girl's "yarns," but these were tales such as he had never heard or imagined before—boys' adventures on

desert islands, that made your hair tingle at the roots to listen to; wonderful narratives of giants that you could not help believing from the way in which they were told. It was not in human nature to resist such stories as these.

Then, as the sun began to creep down behind the mountains, burning a hole through his cloudy curtain of purple and gold, and whiffs of cool air blew inwards from the darkening harbour, Mamy sprang up from her hay-mound, and climbing the railing into an adjoining paddock (there was a gate a few yards lower, but who would waste the time in opening a gate with rails all ready to scramble over?), and proceeded to walk slowly up it, calling "Coop—coop!" in far-reaching, conciliatory tones. Almost simultaneously a large and a small cow, browsing at the top of the paddock, raised their heads and looked at her. Dick meanwhile had run to fetch the milking-pail, and by the time he returned, the cows were coming slowly down the hill, with their heads swaying from right to left from the shoulder, with an indifferent, not-to-be-hurried air. Snow-white, so named after the heroine of Grimm's tales, on account of the fairness of her hide, seemed to swim in an amber light, enveloped in the rays of the setting sun. Her companion, who answered to the more prosaic name of Strawberry, reflected the golden brown glow of autumn woods. Both animals came to a halt when Mamy laid her hand upon them. Snow-white, however, she pulled towards her by the horns and kissed upon the forehead before beginning to milk her. There was no milking-stool. Mamy knelt by the cows in turn, with her head leaning against their flanks, and talked soothingly to them in cow-language, as the milk rained and foamed in the pail under the skilful downward pressure of her supple thumb.

Sydney watched the operation with eyes of naïve wonderment. Country scenes and sports were not unknown to him, but of the mysteries of practical dairying he knew little or nothing. His elder sister, Lucy, was timid of animals, and would go specially in another direction when out walking with her governess, to avoid meeting the cows on their country estate. Mamy, on the contrary, seemed to love them.

She even condescended to give some explanations between the intervals of milking. Snow-white, it seemed, had the sweetest temper, but Strawberry gave the richest milk. As though to prove her displeasure at the slur cast upon her character, or to give immediate proof of the justice of the accusation, Strawberry whisked her tail with a vicious movement as soon as it was her turn to be milked. The first whisk was dexterously contrived to give Mamy a literal slap in the face, and before she had had time to recover from it, a second whisk had scattered the milk over her frock. The hardest part to bear was the peal of hilarious laughter that Strawberry's untoward conduct excited from the rest.

"How *can* you encourage her in such behaviour?" cried Mamy, turning round upon them with a strenuous appeal that was almost pathetic in its indignant earnestness. There was a gleam of something like a tear in her troubled blue eyes.

The others continued to laugh—all save Sydney Warden. Sydney shunned girls as a rule, and Mamy's first manner of recognising him by aiming a "spud" at his head could hardly be looked upon as an inducement to make an exception in her favour. Nevertheless, it is a fact that he darted forward on the impulse of the moment, and laid valiant hold of Strawberry's offending tail. Nay, though the cow, mortally affronted, made as though she would kick him, and did, indeed, partially succeed in boxing his ear with her liberated tail, he remained manfully at his post. Nor did he let go his hold until Mamy rose, flushed and triumphant, from her knees, with the remark :

"She's as sulky as ever she can be. She's been trying to hold back her milk all the time."

She did not thank Sydney for his interposition, and it was Dick—not he—who helped her to carry the pail up the hill. The pair walked on silently together in front, until Dick remarked reflectively :

"I think Sydney Warden's not a bad sort, Mamy, don't you?"

Whereat Mamy, who was chewing a straw, tossed her head indifferently, as much as to say that the subject was

really one which had no interest for her. That Sydney should have been completely subjugated by her warlike attitude at the outset ; that her treatment of him to-day was only typical of the treatment she would bestow on him in the long years to come ; that the destinies the Fates were already spinning for both out of the nebulous mass whence human destinies are evolved had been all foreshadowed in the childish conflicts of the afternoon—what could Mamy know or dream of this ? For her the events of to-day were but as the sunset colours that stained the opposite sky, and that paled and faded as she watched them. Nor was Sydney more conscious than Mamy that his day's impressions were of those that he would never lose.

The entrancing evening came to an end with tea on the veranda—a delightful and scrambling tea, in which hot scones and eggs, and jam and dough-cake, succeeded each other uninterruptedly and abundantly on the same plates. The talk, however, was of a kind that Sydney could not always follow. There was a family vocabulary of which he did not as yet possess the key, and he was also conscious of a vague, undefined quality of singularity that distinguished the accents and gestures of his new friends. At a little distance he would have supposed them to be talking another language—a language rather soft and nasal, with an occasional plaintiveness in it that was almost a whine. I need not say that these opinions remained entirely unformulated by him. If he was conscious of them at all, it was only in the guise of swift, unanalyzed impressions, the analytic tendency being foreign to Sydney's practical nature. He thought Mrs. Clare as different from other mothers as her children were different from other children he had met. If he could have expressed what he felt, he would have said that she did not look to him like a mother at all. Her face was small and sallow, and the hair, lying smoothly on either side of her narrow head, was of the shiniest blackness he had ever seen. Her equally black eyes, that struck him as being much larger than ordinary eyes, moved hither and thither as rapidly as a bird's. At other moments they looked straight before them at nothing. Under both aspects Sydney felt there was something

curious about them. He was reminded of an ayah who had come down from India with a sister of his mother's and her baby to visit them at Hobart. He noticed, among other things, that there was no grace said, a ceremony which was never dispensed with at his own home teas. It was Eila who seemed most bent upon keeping order, though her attention was much taken up by Truca, who sat on a high chair beside her; also by a large retriever dog that rested his paws on the back of her chair, and thrust his head against her neck. Below the veranda darkness was creeping up the hill. It held the town in the hollow, and rested in a broad black shadow upon the harbour. Lights were faintly twinkling on the opposite shore; still the family lingered over their tea. Sydney sat open-mouthed among them now that he had finished eating. It reminded him of being at a play.

Each one seemed to him funnier than the other. Mamy gave an inimitable rendering of the startled demeanour of an old lady who had seen her fall off the haystack unexpectedly the day before, and Truca was made to recount her famous dream, in which, as appeared by her own showing, she "fled" and "fled" all the time, "and didn't get no higher" than the cupboard in the schoolroom.

Dick produced two of the most beautiful beetles in bronze-green armour ever seen, and made believe they were two explorers, wandering over the tablecloth, which was the sea, in search of an enchanted island, which was the butter-dish. To stake impossible sums upon the port they would make for first was a highly exciting game, though it was diversified by an argument between Dick and his mother upon the construction of beetle-brains, which was too suggestive of his school-book upon physical science to have much interest or meaning for Sydney.

By-and-by a golden moon dispelled the darkness. The mounds in the hay-paddock became as silver thrones, whereon the children sat once more in state. Only the occasional alarm of a snake would cause a wild and uncalled-for stampede from time to time on the part of the entire party. Sydney remembered how they had tried to unearth the noisy crickets that snapped and whirred beneath the soil, as



though they had been driving a hundred subterranean lilliputian mills; and how Dick had recounted a yarn (for surely it could have been nothing *but* a yarn) about some little people called earthmen, or gnomes, that used to potter underground in olden times.

The lad carried away more impressions from his first afternoon at Cowa than he could find place for all together in his brain. The crowning impression of all, the one that dominated every other, was the vision of Mamy with her outstretched arm, in the act of hurling the potato at him. Supposing it had really struck him on the temple! It was with a smaller missile than a potato that David had slain the giant Goliath. Sydney remembered this fact, for he was better versed in "Stories from the Bible" than his friends on the hill. Supposing it had struck him as the pebble struck Goliath, and killed him dead on the spot! Would Mamy have been sorry? Or supposing it had only hurt him a little, raised a bump, or given him a bad bruise, would she still have been sorry—a little sorry? Then an unaccountable regret that he had dodged the blow at the critical moment, and thus cut off forever the possibility of knowing whether Mamy would have been sorry, was the main effect of the incident upon Sydney's imagination. Now, his imagination was not easily stimulated, and if the one being who had been potent to work this miracle upon him for the first time in his experience should have been destined to hold her supremacy over him thenceforth and forever, the fact need cause no surprise, physical force led captive by imagination being the theme which has underlain myths and fable-lore from time immemorial, for all such as have sought to penetrate their hidden meaning.

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## CHAPTER I.

## MRS. FROST'S NEWS.

THE day had been warm, but the unfailing sea-breeze, borne in from the great mysterious Antarctic Ocean, blew fresh and cold in young Mrs. Frost's face as she set herself to walk across the rugged slopes of Mount Knocklofty towards the ivy-covered cottage on the New Town Road wherein old Mrs. Frost had her habitation. Knocklofty is not, as its name might seem to imply, an Irish mountain, but a furze and bracken covered hill in the neighbourhood of Hobart, which Hobart, as everybody knows, is the chief city of Tasmania, and quite lovely enough and lonely enough to have inspired a colonial Goldsmith with a poem in imitation of the "Deserted Village of the Plain," with the slight difference that it should be entitled "The Village of the Mountains" instead. Mrs. Frost knew Knocklofty under all its aspects, and so far custom had not withered the infinite variety of its charm in her eyes. She had raced over it like a young colt in the days when she wore socks and short frocks, and her defenceless calves had shown a lattice-work of multitudinous scratches inflicted by the briars and the gorse. Some years later she had carried her water-colours on her rambling, or, to speak more correctly, on her scrambling expeditions to its summit, and had made heroic attempts to reproduce Mount Wellington in a state of incandescence at sunset. Truth to tell, she had anticipated in this line the achievement of certain impressionist painters of to-day, and had accomplished "plein air," as Monsieur Jourdain spoke prose, without being aware of it herself. But for want of guidance, her artistic efforts remained at much the same stage as those she made in many another direction besides—that is to say, they were suggestions rather than performances.

On the particular summer evening in the month of January when you encounter young Mrs. Frost for the first time, impressionist or even "plein air" inspirations are far enough from her thoughts. Not that the scene around her is lack-

ing in elements that might furnish them. The distant harbour, reflecting the late sunset, wears a blood-red glow, that calls to mind one of the most effective of the many effective plagues devised by Moses for the subduing of the stiff-necked Egyptians. House-tops and hill-tops have caught the rosy reflection, and for the space of a few minutes the landscape seems to swim in an amber light. Young Mrs. Frost's face, beautiful enough for all ordinary and superordinary purposes in the garish light of day, becomes celestially transfigured under its influence. Her silhouette takes the semblance of a silver outline, and her cheeks and forehead shine with a wonderful semi-transparent softness, that shows what a beautiful thing human flesh can be for mere light-reflecting purposes alone.

The foregoing phenomenon is familiar to most painters. It presented itself upon the present occasion with the force of a new revelation to a certain Reginald or *Mr.* Reginald Acton, who accidentally, or with malice prepense, overtook young Mrs. Frost just as she was hesitating whether to take a long and tedious road that led to Ivy Cottage by inhabited ways and protected paths, or a short and devious cut (the two qualifications became quite compatible, whatever Cowper may have implied to the contrary), with the same end in view.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed, looking sharply round, as she heard Reginald's tramping footstep behind her. "I'm too glad it's only you!" and she put out her hand.

"Yes, it's only me!" he replied with a smile, as he took the ungloved hand and held it for an instant in his own. "Thanks for the compliment; but I'm 'too glad' on my own account to have caught you up at last, to mind. Now, where are you going, and which way shall we take?"

"I'm going to Ivy Cottage, sir!" The little grimace that accompanied the reply was more eloquent than words could have been. "But don't pity me; I believe it's for the last time."

"For the last time? Why, have you thrown your respected father and mother-in-law over, or have they thrown *you* over?"

"Not they, indeed! but haven't you heard the news? Did they tell you nothing at Cowa?"

"I've heard nothing. I stopped at the garden-gate ten minutes ago to see whether you were discoverable; and your brother Dick, who, by-the-by, had no socks on, only a kind of patent sole strapped to his bare feet, told me in his usual superior way that you had gone to see your mother-in-law. He could not tell me, though, which way you had taken, but I was sure it would be across the hill. So I walked on after you at the rate of—of——"

"Nineteen to the dozen!" interposed Mrs. Frost.

"Ninety-nine to the dozen would be nearer the mark. Anyhow, here I am. You must have had ten minutes' start of me at least, and you were going fast at that. You are not aware, I suppose, that you were turning your back upon one of the finest harbour-views ever known?"

"Was I? Well, let's look at it now."

"Yes, *let's!*" he said, mimicking her with a smile.

"And then I'll tell you the news!" cried young Mrs. Frost, "only I'm not at all sure that it will please you."

"Not please me! Then don't tell it to me just for a moment. I want to have a few moments of perfect enjoyment. The sun will have gone down in another minute. Here! will you have my coat to sit upon?"

"No, indeed I won't!" she laughed disdainfully. "Why, I spend most of my time sitting out upon the ground."

She had suited her action to her words, and was already plumped down after the fashion of a born Australian, to whom the ground or the floor represents an ever-available resting-place, while Reginald was considering how he should dispose himself upon the stony soil by her side.

"Here's a lovely place to see it from," she said. "I'm glad you told me of it. It *is* beautiful! Couldn't one almost be a Parsee, with a sky like that to worship? I've heard people talk about a man not being able to set the Thames on fire, but I'm sure it looks as though the Derwent were all aflame, doesn't it? And what lovely little jags of gold in the clouds!"

As she spoke, the rim of the sun, a disc of burning gold,

was still visible above the horizon. A moment later he had slowly dropped behind the mountains, sending up, as he sank, shafts of brightness that seemed to slash the sky with colour. Young Mrs. Frost "fetched a sigh," as our great-grandparents would have said, and turned her illumined face towards her companion.

Reginald's "few moment's of perfect enjoyment" were plainly written upon his countenance. His was a face that might have belonged to an inhabitant of the fabled Palace of Truth, notwithstanding the fact that he had been through the usual training which enjoins the civilized man to hide his emotions from the world. It was of a blonde hue, upon which, as upon an ivory tablet, all that recorded itself might be read by those who ran. His eyes were of the good honest blue often to be seen in the eyes of Norwegian sailors, and when he was troubled, they had a suffused look that would have been very touching to a mother or a woman friend. The cut of his features was far from being classic. There was a curious scoop in the bridge of the nose that gave something of a bovine suggestion to the profile. The front view, however, displaying the pleasant trusting eyes, the broad tip of a sun-burned nose, and the well-disciplined profusion of close-cut whisker, beard and moustache, that concealed all the lower part of the face, never failed to impress the spectator agreeably. It was doubtful whether young Mrs. Frost had ever thought of judging it critically. Reginald was "nice" (and this is the paramount consideration from a feminine point of view), and he always looked nice, under whatever circumstances he might be encountered. Besides which, she had perhaps fewer opportunities for judging him impartially than other people, seeing that, unconsciously to himself, his whole being was quickened—in the Scriptural sense of the word—in her presence. He had been her friend and almost her confidant for more than a year; he had not been in Tasmania more than eighteen months himself; and the difference of age between them, some twelve or fifteen years, coupled with the fact that he had seen so much of the world in his naval officer days, inclined her to pay more heed to his counsels than she was apt to bestow upon those of most

other people who were rash enough to offer them. The difficulty of young Mrs. Frost's position (and the sequel will show how really difficult it was) inclined her to resent the well-meant advice that was proffered to her.

"What is the use of their talking so?" she would say to herself impatiently. "I get more help out of a page of Herbert Spencer than out of all the sermons they can preach in a week."

The "they" referred in this instance to father-in-law, mother-in-law, friends and acquaintances generally, for as far as her own brothers and sisters were concerned, live and let live was too instinctive a principle among them to allow of their assuming a critical attitude towards her, unless their own plans were directly encompassed by hers.

The gold was fading out of the clouds before young Mrs. Frost broke the silence again. Possibly she was loath to drive the radiant reflection from her companion's eyes until his few moments of enjoyment were well counted. She waited until he turned his glance expectantly towards her. He was half sitting, half reclining by her side, with his elbow propped up on a corner of her faded blue cotton frock spread around her as she sat.

"Well?" he said interrogatively, and the smile that accompanied the interrogation spoke of the entire sense of well-being and freedom from all constraint he felt in her presence. "Well?"

"Well?" she replied hesitatingly.

She had picked up some dried wattle twigs from the ground, and was sorting them on her lap as a pretext for not looking at him.

"You know I warned you that it was news you would not approve of. It is only this, that we are thinking of going home."

Reginald started up. He did not answer immediately. His face contracted into an expression of pained bewilderment.

"Home, you say? What do you mean? What home are you speaking of?"

"Why, Home with a capital 'H,' of course. England—Europe, that is to say. What other home is there?"

Her companion did not answer. Even the exclamation of surprise that she was waiting for found no utterance. In very truth the light that was fading so slowly from the sky seemed to have passed in one lightning flash from his life. He could not have spoken at this moment, feeling stunned by the announcement, as by a blow. He had sometimes fancied, notwithstanding the impassable gulf that separated him from this woman by his side, that she had measured his love for her in her secret heart; that she had silently divined its strength, its depth, its boundlessness; nay, that she had even made a shrine for it in the inmost recesses of her soul, where none could see or penetrate. And now, like a child that crushes a butterfly for very wantonness, she had crushed this blessed trust of his with a word. He was sure, though his eyes were turned seaward, away from hers, that a half-triumphant smile was hovering on her lips. He could detect it without looking at her, in the very sound of her voice. She had been waiting pitilessly and cruelly to produce her effect, while he, poor fool! had been thinking, in the words of Longfellow, "Oh, what a glory doth this world put on!" for the sole reason that it was with her that he was looking forth upon the sunset this evening.

Her voice had always possessed an especial charm for him. It was one of those voices set in a flexible treble key that vibrate to fun and pathos at an instant's notice. It had been the most tuneful voice hitherto, to his thinking, that he had ever heard; but now, for the first time, it rang falsely upon his ear. Surely she could not have required the spoken assurance that he cared for her. Was not his very silence the best proof of it he could give her, seeing how she was situated? What had he ever asked beyond the privilege of serving her with a dog-like devotion? And this was his reward. This was the way in which she recompensed him. She had brought him out this evening (he forgot in his bitterness that he had followed her of his own accord) only to tell him, as though it were the most indifferent piece of

gossip in the world, that "they were thinking of going home," that she was about to put half the globe between her and himself, to take very likely an eternal farewell of him ! How lightly she had spoken of it ! What truth there was in what Tennyson had said of woman ! The lesser man—that was it ! Even her sentiments and passions, compared with his, were but as moonlight unto sunlight, or as water unto wine ! She was incapable of fathoming the feeling he had for her. There was no measure for it in her nature. It was useless even to allow himself to feel anger against her.

Yet anger is a palliative, or, rather, a counter-irritant, when the heart is smarting. Reginald felt worse when he ceased to be angry. There was a cold intonation in his voice when he next spoke which reminded his companion of those far-away childish days when people had been "distant" to her because she had been "a bad girl," in the nursery acceptance of the phrase.

"How long have you been hatching this fine plan, may I ask ?" were Reginald's words, very stiffly pronounced ; "and when do you think of putting it into execution ?"

"We've been hatching it in one sense all our lives," replied young Mrs. Frost.

Her lips were curving in spite of herself. Reginald's offended demeanour prompted her to the motiveless laughter we are sometimes inclined to indulge in, sorely against the grain, when some doleful tidings are suddenly imparted to us.

"I'll tell you all about it from the beginning, if you like, and then you must say just what you think of it, you know."

Her accents were cajoling. It was incumbent upon her to condone that insane inclination to laugh—the more so that laughter would not have been by any means a true reflection of her mood of the moment.

"It will take rather a long time to explain, I am afraid," she went on, in the same conciliatory tones ; "and I dare say it will seem rather a sudden move to you, but it doesn't to us. We have discussed it so long among ourselves ; and I would have told you about it ages ago, only thereby hangs



a tale. We were pledged to secrecy. I had promised mother not to say a word about it to a living soul."

"Oh, if your mother is in it——" replied the young man, curtly.

There was something in the manner of his rejoinder that did not please his companion. She stiffened herself unconsciously as she sat upon the ground. Reginald's back (he had drawn up his knees and encircled them with his arms as he gazed gloomily at the bay) looked as though it breathed a challenge.

"You are not respectful to mother," she said; "in fact, you very seldom are. I have noticed it often before. Don't you think mother is a very clever woman?"

Reginald paused for an instant; then he said:

"What, clever!" with a certain inflection that was not entirely satisfactory to his interlocutress, for she flushed as she repeated in sharpened tones:

"Yes, clever—very clever! Not in a managing, pushing, worldly way, perhaps, but in an intellectual way. You know she is. Did you ever hear anyone talk better than mother on all kinds of subjects? The cleverest men from England—University men, and writers, and people of that kind—enjoy talking to her. Do you remember Dr. Umbeck, on board the German man-of-war? I don't believe he missed coming up a single day all the time the *Prinzessin* was in port to eat strawberries and cream at Cowa. He said mother had 'an all-embracing soul.' He used to talk to her by the hour together."

"Yes, and look at *you*! I remember the old beast!" interposed Reginald grimly. "It is not my place to discuss your mother's qualities with you, I know, but I should like to give my real candid opinion about her cleverness for once, if you'll promise not to be offended."

"Offended! I couldn't be more offended than I am at the bare suggestion that you could have anything to say that I shouldn't like. You had better speak right out, just to show that you would never have dared to harbour a thought about her I shouldn't approve. You are not going to deny that mother is clever, I suppose?"

"No, no; not altogether." The slow reluctance with which he spoke added impressiveness to his words. "Of course no one would deny that your mother is what old-fashioned writers would have called a woman of parts. But they want co-ordinating and arranging. You have a weakness for fanciful similes, I know. Well, I will tell you what your mother's abilities remind me of. They remind me of quicksilver spilled upon a table. You know what it is like, don't you? You must have seen how it breaks up into bright little balls, and runs all over the place, first in one direction, then in another. There's never any getting hold of it, although it's so pretty and effective. And it's tremendously useful, you know, when you amalgamate it with something else, or when you shut it up in glass. Only——"

"Only!" interrupted young Mrs. Frost indignantly. "I won't listen to another word. Your quicksilver simile may be very smart; unfortunately, it doesn't apply. We will leave mother's name out of the question in our future discussions, if you please. What I want to know now is, Are you going to Ivy Cottage with me, or are you not? For if we don't go on at once, it will be long past tea-time when I get there, and I shall be expected to stay to prayers; then what will become of you, waiting in the dark outside?"

"I am quite ready," said Reginald, rising to his feet, and holding out a hand to assist her.

It made him smile half sadly to note the impatient gesture with which she rejected his proffered aid, and, springing to her feet, continued her way a few paces in front of him, half walking and half running at such an accelerated rate of speed that he was obliged to increase his own to a "go-as-you-please" pace to enable him to keep up with her.

"The Red Indian stride!" he called out after her, laughing. "I know what mood you are in when you put that on. But you're not going to quarrel with me to-night, are you? I will take back all I said if you will be friends again; and when will you tell me about the journey home? I can't believe you are in earnest. Did you mean that you are all going away together?"

"Yes—all."

She jerked out her reply over her shoulder with an air of ruffled dignity.

"What! your mother, and the Philosopher, and the Nihilist, and the Warbler, and Truca?"

"The whole boiling," said young Mrs. Frost recklessly. "But see! those are the lights of Ivy Cottage. We are almost there. Where shall I find you waiting for me when I come out?"

"Here." He pointed to a large boulder with his walking-stick. "I can sit and meditate upon this stone. You won't be very long, will you? Couldn't you by any possibility give me a clue to your reasons, or your mother's reasons, for wanting to leave Tasmania before you go?"

"Not by any possibility. Didn't I tell you it was a long story?"

"Well, one question only before you go. Have you come into an inheritance?"

"No; and I won't answer. But we have prospects——"

"Prospects! what prospects?" he shouted after her.

But she was gone, and her back was turned upon him before he could say any more. He stood for a moment looking after the elastic figure as it moved swiftly forward in the gathering gloom, telling himself that, amidst unnumbered crowds, he could swear to its identity, no matter from what distance he should see it. Even now, in the indistinct, fast-waning light, the stately poise of the head, like that of a Rebecca at the well; the roundness of the waist; the supple curve in the back, that conferred so pre-eminently what the French call *la taille cambrée* on its possessor; the Diana-like hips, and the buoyant tread, marked her out from all other women he knew. He did not carry out his promise of meditating upon a stone, after all. He set himself to walk to and fro as he waited for her, so absorbed in his thought of her that he almost forgot to wonder at her prolonged absence.

And while he is waiting and thinking, it may be as well to explain why his thoughts did not harmonize with the merry heart which goes all the day, while "your sad tires in a mile-a."

Young Mrs. Frost's actual position, and the fate which caused her to tumble into it, have no small share in them; and by setting it forth I shall best reveal the thoughts that weigh so heavily upon Reginald's mind as he walks up and down in the gathering darkness waiting for her.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A HOME IN TASMANIA.

"That he is mad, 'tis true :  
'Tis true, 'tis pity ; and pity 'tis, 'tis true."

SHAKESPEARE.

COWA COTTAGE, young Mrs. Frost's home, might have been aptly described in Macaulay's words :

"Like an eagle's nest  
Hangs on the crest  
Of purple Apennine."

For "Apennine" it would have been necessary, however, to substitute the less poetic name of "Knocklofty," which, if not as high, forms at least as wild and as purple a background as the one the poet had in his mind.

Cowa was not only our heroine's home ; it was her birth-place as well. Some seventeen years before she became Mrs. Frost, she made her entry into what Mr. Tulliver called with reason this "puzzling world," at a time when the roses were in full bloom in Tasmania—that is to say, shortly before Christmas. She was named Eila, which is the Russian synonym for "mountain," and promised to exemplify Balzac's theory that there is an occult connection between people and the names they bear by shooting up into a vigorous mountain flower in her own person. Her family name was Clare, and the sequence of Eila Clare had a euphonious ring that was well adapted to the personality it represented. There were not people wanting, however, who said that

Eila was as peculiar as her name; but as this was a charge that was levelled against the Clare family *en masse*, it may have been only made by those who, to use a Spencerian word, could not contra-distinguish her from her surroundings.

Eila's father, dead some years back, had occupied a modest post in the Treasury. His individuality had been in a great measure extinguished by his wife's, of whom more will be said anon. He died before Eila was in long dresses, the father of four children, the elder of whom retained more or less vaguely the recollection of the paternal presence at the breakfast-table, and at late tea, as something kindly, orderly, somewhat silent, appearing and disappearing at stated hours as regularly as the sun rose and set. In aftertimes they comprehended that this unobtrusive presence had, to a great extent, kept the household together; that it was owing to its silent influence that the meals had been ready at their appointed hour, and that the boys had been sent regularly to school; also that the charge of being peculiar had been so much less frequently levelled against their mother and themselves. It required, however, a long experience to enable them to realize this fact, just as it has taken mankind a long time to discover the silent forces at work around them, albeit they have been ready at all times to bow themselves before the thunderbolt and the rainbow. Mrs. Clare maintained her husband's system, in so far as was possible without doing too great a violence to her nature, for some years after his death. He had insured his life, in deference to a curious prescience of the fate that finally overtook him, and had left his widow Cowa Cottage, and an income of some three hundred a year that required careful eking out to enable her to feed, and clothe, and educate five children upon it. In justice to Eila's mother, it must be said that the habit of running into debt did not find a place among her other idiosyncrasies. A certain profit, moreover, was reaped from the garden, which was kept in order by the eldest of the boys. As doctors' and apothecaries' bills were unknown, Mrs. Clare even found it possible to lay by part of her income every year towards the carry-

ing out of a scheme cherished by all the family together—of going to Europe at some future time.

Though each little Clare came into the world with a separate and strongly marked individuality, there were certain traits they possessed in common which made them understand and feel certain things through and for each other as no one out of the family could have done. For example, they all evinced a metaphysical bias, more especially in their younger years; and there was not one of them, with the exception of Willie, the practical elder son, who did not go through a similar awakening to the crushing apprehension of infinite time and space between the ages of seven and twelve. Eila, despite her vigorous constitution and healthy pagan joy in being, had one of the worst attacks. It was long before she could contemplate the orthodox idea that souls must go on living eternally without a sick terror, that drove her to wish there were no such thing as conscious existence in space. Similarly, in their tender years the Clare children one and all went through the same phase of mystic piety. I fear that Eila's was the shortest. At the time of her friendship with Reginald Acton, she believed she had reached finality of opinion as regarded questions of faith. An agnosticism that wavered between pessimism and optimism according to the mood of the moment, or that followed the impressions resulting from the latest topic in the home papers, would have best defined her spiritual attitude. As regarded worldly affairs, she had remained exceedingly childish and credulous, notwithstanding the lesson taught her by her early and ill-considered marriage. She had, nevertheless, a naïve belief in conventionality, and made conscientious efforts to practise it in her own behalf as a corrective to the total absence of it in her family. She did not like to feel that they were looked upon as pariahs. It was she who obliged her mother to return the rare calls that were made at Cowa Cottage, and to tie her bonnet-strings according to the prevailing fashion. Her brother and sister, a pair of twin rebels, mocked at her for what they called her "society ways"; but she was leniently judged in this as in other respects, partly because of her heart-and-soul devotion

to her family, and partly, perhaps, by reason of her personal attractions. A mere classic outline would not have counted for much. But Eila had something more than a classic outline. She had the kind of warm, loving, radiant influence that made her presence bring an actual sense of well-being with it, like the light and perfume of apple-blossoms. It was almost worth while having a headache to feel her warm, magnetic touch wander over brows and temples, and gradually charm it away. Truca, the youngest of the band, a strange little soul, the only delicate member of the family, never forgot how on winter nights her sister had knelt by her bed to hold the little marble-cold feet in her soft warm hands, and bring back the vivifying heat to them. That Eila should have possessed so sympathetic a comprehension of pain and suffering was the more extraordinary that she was a very Hygeia in her own person, and might, indeed, have served as a prototype of that radiant goddess when she wandered about the descending hay-field during Christmas week, with her arms full of tall Christmas lilies and scarlet geraniums, gathered from the riotous hedge that bordered the two-acre cow-paddock. At the age of seventeen she committed the crowning error of her life—an error so great that it is necessary to remember that, if seventeen is coupled with sweetness, it is certainly not allied with wisdom, to find any kind of excuse for it. She was not quite so pretty or quite so refined-looking at this time as she subsequently became, possibly because the very exuberance of her youth and health, like the luxuriant growths that prevent the forest from being seen, obscured what French writers call *la ligne* in her otherwise charming figure. To put the matter more plainly, she was too stout. Some years later, when time and grief had taken her in hand, the slender throat, the dainty wrists, the delicate framework—all, in fact, that the same French writers include under the name of *les fines attaches*—were more clearly appreciable. It may have been partly for this reason, and partly because a beauty, like a prophet, of home production sometimes lacks honour in her own country, that the Hobart world did not at first endorse her claims to be considered beautiful. There was, nevertheless,

a certain uneasy foreboding among enterprising mammas of marriageable daughters that strangers might "see something" in Eila Clare. Strangers, it is well known, are looked upon in Hobart much in the light of those sons of God who came down to visit the daughters of men. Amongst those who flock to Tasmania in the season, there is generally one in the shape of an heir to an English estate, or a squatter with hundreds of square miles to his share in Australia, who may be said to represent the winning number. To draw the prize, or at least a good number, for her daughter was the natural and legitimate ambition of many a Tasmanian mother, who would gladly have seen Eila non-existent, or married off-hand, to remove her from the ranks of the competitors.

By what fatality she played into the hands of these schemers of her own accord, it would be hard to say. In a logical cause-and-effect age, we no longer have the resource of ascribing our foolish deeds to the stars; and though a new philosophy may show that, under given circumstances, we are mathematically constrained to act in a given way, because our actions are only the sum of countless actions performed by countless progenitors, who in their turn obeyed unconsciously the law of their being, the theory does not satisfactorily explain why we should occasionally go, to all appearance deliberately and wilfully, out of our way to bring about our own undoing. This is precisely what Eila did, notwithstanding the fact that she prided herself upon having a logical mind; and it is the more difficult to give a colour of probability to her conduct, that in after-times she was at a loss to account for it to herself.

It had happened during her first season of gaiety. The Clares would have occupied a place in an undefined borderland if they had been in what is called society at all. But as they gave themselves no trouble in this respect, and thought of nothing but amusing themselves in their own way, they had no defined place or status, no social position, indeed, of any kind. They went where they were invited when they saw a prospect of amusing themselves. Otherwise, the thousand and one reasons for which people go to



each other's houses against their inclinations had no weight with them. Eila, however, loved dancing, and for the dear delight of waltzing at a subscription ball she would walk with her brother (who at sixteen was allowed to take part in such festivities in a tailless jacket and white gloves)—she would walk with him, I say, down a stony hill-road of impossible steepness, and through a mile-long, ill-paved street at nine o'clock at night, to return by the same purgatorial path at two in the morning, so light of heart and foot that she could have waltzed up the hill with the most entire enjoyment, if any of her evening's partners had presented themselves for the occasion.

It was at a carpet-dance at the house of some neighbours on the hill that she met Charles Frost, a young man of some eight or nine and twenty, with whom, however, she did not dance, for the reason that his interpretation of his mission in life forbade him to indulge in that exercise. He was the only son of an elderly couple, living, as Eila knew (for every one in Hobart knows where everybody else lives), in a long, low-roofed, dark cottage, known as Ivy Cottage, about a mile from Cowa. Mr. Frost senior had enjoyed a post in connection with the Supreme Court in the old days of transportation (when the island was still known as Van Diemen's Land, and home readers who had no connections in the colonies knew of it principally through the medium of "Gulliver's Travels"), in which capacity he had assisted cheerfully at the flogging and hanging of unnumbered convicts. He had married somewhat late in life the mature, but still handsome, daughter of a Presbyterian minister, by whom he had had an only son. The rigorous bringing up of the lad had had the usual effect of driving him into wild courses, in which, however, he was violently pulled up at the age of one-and-twenty by the combined efforts of a narrow escape from drowning and the theatrical declamations of a revival preacher. During his reckless period he had taken to the Bush, where he had distinguished himself principally as a splendid rider and a hard drinker. He had even reached the point of knocking down his check in a week's debauch in the nearest township with the first boon com-

panion, broken-down gentleman, boundary-rider, or shearer that chance threw in his way. His parents were unable to cope with him, but they wrestled for him (as they termed it themselves) with the Lord. They never doubted that it was their pertinacity in this respect that had saved him. When he returned to them three years later he had become a religious enthusiast. To a disciple of Maudesley there would have been something not entirely reassuring in a certain air of suppressed excitement that betrayed itself when he spoke upon religious subjects. But to Eila, who had not yet finished growing, he appeared in the light of an inspired teacher. She had been nourishing her imagination upon Bret Harte's heroes, as a former generation nourished its romantic craving upon "Lara" and the "Corsair," and could conceive no more delightful ideal than the reckless, chivalrous Jack Hamlyn type, with the athletic frame and the wonderful blue eyes, trusting as a child's and brazen as a profligate's. Many an otherwise pure woman is irresistibly fascinated—especially in early youth—by this particular type. Curiously enough, Charles Frost, despite his religious enthusiasm, was not unlike it outwardly. Eila would have indignantly repudiated the notion that this circumstance could have had anything to do with her *engouement* (I wonder what English word could adequately render the meaning of *engouement* ?) for him. Yet I fear there was more of the personal and magnetic in his influence than she had any idea of herself. After her first meeting with him she lay awake the best part of the night, recalling the sensation that had thrilled her as she felt his eyes following her about the room, while she floated round to the "Blue Danube" and "Belle Hélène" of an amateur pianist with an indifferent partner. How she glorified him in her imagination! She behaved, indeed, with a weakness worthy of the stronger sex under the influence of a first overpowering attack of the midsummer madness called "calf love." But calf love is an extenuating circumstance that women are not allowed to plead in their own behalf. We know that in all that concerns the ever-vexed question of the relations of the sexes, it is from the so-called weaker sex that the mature

judgment, the cool head, the stoical self-mastery are exacted—at the cost of the heaviest penalties should they fail in any of these qualities. To men the consequences of a first mistake are comparatively of small account, for, without going so far as to say that they may indulge upon a certain number of trial trips before embarking upon the unknown sea of matrimony, it is certain that they may play at being in love, or may fall in and out of love, an unlimited number of times without exciting much reprobation.

Women's experiences are necessarily restricted and timid. Yet they are just as likely, if we would only admit it, to be taken in by their own first gropings towards love and passion as men. How many there are who, looking back towards their own youthful experiences, would be obliged to own that more than once they could have found it in their hearts to say in Tennyson's words to the hero of the hour, "No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield," and who are fain to bless their lucky stars, or whatever does duty for these, that circumstances prevented them from saying it, since events have proved that their hero of the hour was emphatically the wrong man in the most extended sense of the phrase.

Eila did not give herself time to discover that Charles Frost was her wrong man. There was a curious fascination in perceiving how the severity with which he regarded her melted into wistful love as she came close to him. She thought that the tumult of feeling he raised in her was spiritual, and made no allowance for the influence of six feet of splendidly developed manhood upon the Juliet side of a many-sided nature. And yet, as I have already shown, there was much that was magnetic in his mastery over her. She would turn from white to crimson, and from crimson to white, when she met him. She gave up the dear delight of dancing for his sake, and sat out the seductive waltzes at the Hobart parties with him, making her confession of faith or non-faith behind her fan in the flirtation corners arranged by the hostess. She thought his narrow creed beautiful, because he acted up to it himself; and though her reason rebelled against it, she almost cried with gratitude when he

proposed to her. He was convinced, he told her, that he would bring her into the fold. Nevertheless, the course of their love did not run smooth. There was strenuous opposition on the part of the young man's parents, who shunned the Clares as a godless family, and looked upon Eila as a brand that might well be left to the burning. There were also protests on the part of Eila's own mother, brothers, and sisters, who had always taken it for granted that, when Eila contributed a husband to the family, he must have something in common with them as well as herself.

But, in spite of all this opposition, or, perhaps, by reason of it, the marriage took place in due—Eila's relatives would have said in *undue*—time. The bride was still in a state of semi-exaltation, half mystic, half sensuous, as she stood before the altar of the Presbyterian church, and endorsed with voice and heart all the impossible vows and promises that the minister put into her mouth.

The rest of her disastrous history is soon told. She went to live with her husband in Victoria, where he cultivated his garden, not by planting cabbages like *Candide*, but in the shape of a 600 acre selection. He also performed the office of reader in the nearest Presbyterian church. It was a modest home to which he conducted his radiant bride; but Eila was prepared to be as happy as the day in it (though why a day should bear so blissful an interpretation, I cannot say). But Fate showed her from the first the frowning visage of a Medusa. During their honeymoon, the child-bride made the appalling discovery that her husband was subject to epileptic fits, the consequence, though she did not know it, of former excesses. Before the first year was over, he had developed certain symptoms of incipient insanity. The shocks of discovery followed each other so quickly and unmercifully, that had it not been for the recollection of mother, brothers, and sisters, and of the place she held in their hearts, Eila must have killed herself in her despair. She had a constitution that refused to be destroyed by mere mental anguish, though she believed that she suffered enough at this time to make it possible for her to die of grief. The worst of all was the complete revulsion of feelings he under-

went as regarded her husband. All that she had looked upon before as high and holy inspiration appeared to her now in the light of the outcome of a diseased mind. There could be no longer any thought of asking for an explanation of fanatical views or gloomy prophecies. It was enough if day followed day without bringing some irremediable catastrophe in its wake. She was tender of her husband, but unfeignedly terrified of him. She followed him through the weary stages of irritability and loss of memory that obliged him to suspend his work, until the awful, never-to-be-forgotten morning when she went out upon the veranda to consult him upon their approaching departure for Tasmania, where she looked for help and protection, and saw him advance towards her with a Bible in one hand and a knife in the other, and that in his face that made her heart stand still. Madness and murder were written in it; and as she fled into the garden, and thence hatless down the bush-track that separated her from the cottages lying on the outskirts of the township, sending forth shriek upon shriek as she ran, she could fancy she felt, as in some hideous nightmare, his hot breath upon her neck. But help in the shape of some sturdy woodsplitters was near at hand. The madman was secured, and finally taken in a bush-buggy, lent by some neighbours for the occasion, to the hospital in the nearest township, "cursing, swearing, and gnawing his fingers," as King John is said to have done in Dickens' dramatic description of the latter end of that unholy monarch. His wife was never at his mercy again. Charles Frost's father came to Victoria for him by the next steamer, and the now dangerous lunatic was placed among the paying patients in the New Norfolk Asylum near Hobart. A little allowance of twenty pounds a year was doled out to Eila by her father-in-law, after she had returned like a wounded bird to the home-nest.

It was more than four years now since this tragedy had occurred. Eila was no longer an obstacle to the matrimonial chances of the Hobart belles. When the English men-of-war sailed into the harbour, and the Melbourne steamers brought their eagerly expected contingent of strangers, rival

mothers no longer trembled lest her beauty should carry off the prize. She might grow more beautiful every day for all they cared, and for all the serious harm she could do them now. At the first word of admiration that her appearance excited, a hundred informants were ready to whisper, "She has a husband in the asylum, and they are *such* a peculiar family."

For the first year after her return, Eila was as one stunned by a too great shock. She had gone through experiences sufficient, in the course of a few short months, to fill a five-act drama. She had been madly in love with a creation of her own that she had fastened upon a flesh-and-blood lover. Before her honeymoon was half over, a black gulf of horror had yawned before her. She had been all but frightened to death while she was still a child-wife, and was so shaken and unstrung when she re-entered her childhood's home that the mere banging of a door sufficed to make her weep hysterically. But she had an elastic nature, and youth and health besides. When, as in John Barleycorn, "the kindly spring came round again," her own spring season seemed to return. She put aside the recollection of her ghastly year of courtship and matrimony as an ugly dream, a memory to be locked away like the skeleton in her cupboard, and never brought to light. Though she must not think of love and marriage, she need not, she told herself, forego all the pleasures that belonged to her age, though of these I am forced to own there were not a few that might have been qualified as childish in the extreme—to wit, those of romping in the hay, or of swinging upon the roundabout with the younger members of the family.

Her short experience of wedded life had inclined her to look upon matrimony with horror. But it was as natural to her to sun herself now and again in the admiration she excited as for a flower to turn to the light. Her own brothers and sisters were the first to bestow it upon her, and it was upon them that she lavished now all the abundance of her young affections.

Two years after her return she began to appear once more in the Hobart world. It was at a picnic that has re-

mained famous in Hobart annals that she met Reginald Acton for the first time, soon after her social resurrection. There are English naval officers scattered about the world who must remember the prodigious snowstorm that overtook a party of picnickers upon the desolate stony summit of Mount Wellington several years ago, and the adventurous descent amid the blinding snowflakes that followed. More than one excursionist would have remained behind, never perhaps to have been heard of again, but for the timely help of a few brave climbers. It fell to Reginald's share to take charge of young Mrs. Frost, and as he guided, half leading, half carrying her across that stony ocean of desolation known as the Ploughed Field, it first came into his thoughts that here, by Heaven's grace, was the one maid for him. But Eila was a wife, and not a maid, and Reginald possessed a simple code of honour that forbade him to make love to a married woman. Perhaps his abstention in this respect was a salve to his conscience in others, for he did not hide from himself the fact that he loved her. He became her friend, her confidant, and her counsellor, almost her father confessor as well. He believed that he knew all her thoughts, fancies, failings, and faults, and he loved them one and all because they were hers. He had left the navy to remain with a widowed and half-paralyzed mother, living in a quiet suburb of quiet Hobart, and had accepted a modestly-remunerated post as secretary to an insurance company. Why he did not marry was a question which exercised many minds, especially feminine ones, in the little community. Something in his staid and gentle bearing inspired confidence, even before two years of an apparently immaculate way of life had established his title to respect. Curiously enough, his friendship for young Mrs. Frost, though it had become a recognised fact in Hobart, had not as yet exposed either of the friends to the most poisoned shafts of Mrs. Grundy. The world, despite its ill-nature, is often sharper in its judgments than we give it credit for. It is true that by a certain portion of the community Eila was talked about, and we know that it is never to her advantage that a woman, be she young or old, is talked about; but the majority held

that Reginald was biding his time until she should be free; and there were many who believed him capable of biding it for twenty years as faithfully as for twenty months.

Meanwhile, what view did Reginald himself take of his position? Not a very hopeful one to-night, it is to be feared, judging by the air of gloomy abstraction that clouds his pleasant Saxon face as he walks to and fro along the grass-grown border of the quiet little street, round the corner of which Eila has disappeared. A charming twilight view (for Hobart is far enough South to enjoy a short rehearsal of home twilights) lies spread before him in the indigo waters of the harbour and the slate-coloured outline of the hills beyond, cut out against the whitening sky with almost photographic distinctness. But he has no eyes for it now. What is a beautiful landscape, after all, but a subjective enjoyment? What will the harbour and the hills have to say to him when Eila is no longer there? What relief can he look for in them from the heart-heaviness that has begun to weigh upon him already? How is he to reconcile love and duty? and, above all, how is he to live without Eila?

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### CHAPTER III.

#### HOW EILA WAS RECEIVED AT IVY COTTAGE.

IVY COTTAGE represented a curious *ramassis* of such articles of furniture as may still be found in the back-parlours of hereditary shopkeepers in small provincial towns in England. At the time when Mr. and Mrs. Frost first set up housekeeping in Hobart, the communication between the mother-country and Tasmania was carried on principally by means of convict and emigrant ships, which succeeded each other at long and irregular intervals. Just as the visitor to Eastern towns is sometimes confronted in the outskirts of some Oriental bazaar with an incongruous heap of ill-assorted sets of tumblers, lop-sided dishes, and tawdry ornaments of divers descriptions, representing the overflow



of depots of Brummagem ware in England and Germany, so one might encounter in the early days in Tasmania the most heterogeneous assortment of rubbish in the shops and stores that the devices of the exporter could bring together. There was a general impression, which was not destroyed by the splendid specimens of man and woman hood to be found among the early settlers, that the use of the colonies was to serve as the receptacle for all the failures of the old world—not only the moral failures, in the shape of law-breakers and superfluous sons, but the manufactured failures, in the shape of wry mirrors, rickety tables, and other articles that no one would have anything to say to at home.

Ivy Cottage, furnished under the double disadvantage of belonging to a master and mistress who had nothing to exercise their taste upon, and no taste to exercise—the one being, perhaps, a consequence of the other—might have served as an illustration for an Australian esthete of the depths of Philistinism to which the unregenerate, unaided faculty of judgment in man and woman may arrive. Everything it contained was an outrage to the canons of the modern conceptions of art. There was a black horsehair sofa, in the so-called best parlour, that pricked all the unprotected parts of the body that reclined upon it, and there were hectic-cheeked apples and peaches in wax under a glass shade upon a table upholstered in green and white beads. There were likewise hideous lithographs of Scriptural scenes that swore, as the French expressively call it, with the bilious background of the inartistic wall-paper, suggestive of beetles sprawling upon a yellow counterpane. To make matters worse, it had been old Mrs. Frost's ambition to act up to the laudatory words of the twenty-seventh verse of the last chapter of Proverbs, which corresponded to the date of her birthday, and which declared that "she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."

Having made a sampler of the aforesaid text in parti-coloured words, and hung it up between the painted photographs of her husband and herself, she set about proving its applicability by manufacturing a set of chair-coverings in

alternate lozenges of green and violet worsted. The result was so startlingly incongruous, that even to her own untutored taste it was necessary to tone down the effect by the aid of crochet antimacassars. It needed, under these adverse circumstances, all the severely benignant influence of her husband's presence to lend any sort of home-like dignity to their abode. But just as hats and coats acquire, in the course of time, something of the individuality of their wearers, so the inanimate objects that surround us seem ultimately to reflect something of our own personalities to those who see us constantly amongst them. The stiff crude green-and-purple arm-chair in which Eila was accustomed to see her father-in-law seated had almost the solemnity of a Solomon's judgment-seat in her eyes. She would never have thought of mocking at the sampler that her mother-in-law had worked, even in her secret mind. Reginald was the only person who suspected the under-current of resentment that the severe and simple rule of life of the inmates of Ivy Cottage excited in her. She would not even allow her own family to make merry at their expense. Their standard might be narrow, but at least they acted up to it themselves. She was perfectly aware that they judged her severely by it, but she was too loyal to avenge herself by joining with her brothers and sisters in calling them prigs and frumps. She knew that their interpretation of life's mission was quite different from that held by herself and her belongings. For all she knew, it might be a better one than theirs. It was harder to act up to under every-day circumstances ; but when a crushing calamity, such as the affliction which had befallen their only son, came upon the elderly couple, they were enabled to bear it with a certain lofty resignation that she could not but recognise and admire. Her position with regard to her husband's parents was peculiar. There were moments when she could almost have found it in her heart to wish that she had the strength to act up to their standard ; but her habitual feeling about them was one of secret annoyance that they should be so indifferent to the qualities in her that seemed to exercise such sway over other people. The things that counted for so much in the eyes of her family seemed to pass

unperceived in theirs. She had a vague half-acknowledged sense that more allowances should be made for a person in her position, who was young and pretty, than for another. Neither of her husband's parents seemed to hold this view. They would have had her lead the life of a recluse, she complained; she was not even sure that they did not blame her in secret for running over the hills with her younger brothers and sisters in her muslin-crowned garden-hat, and house-frock of blue cotton. Evidently they thought her frivolous and heartless. "But how can I change my nature?" she would say to herself in self-defence. Her thoughts refused to dwell in the neighbourhood of the dreary asylum where her husband spent his time in mouthing out meaningless blasphemies. Why should she force them to revert to it? Had she been a widow, would it not have been considered pardonable, after a lapse of nearly two years, to smile and laugh when the occasion offered? And surely her husband was as dead to her as though he had been lying under the churchyard sod! His soul—his very self had gone away. Nay, had he been dead, she could have clung to his memory. Being what he was, she could only pray Heaven to keep him out of her mind.

The twilight had already deepened into a semi-darkness, beyond which the horizon looked ghastly white; and the silhouettes of distant objects were pencilled against the sky with strange distinctness as she approached Ivy Cottage. The lamp was alight. Eila could see the reflection through the horsehair blinds that fitted into the window-frame as she walked up the little garden entrance over the flags in white sandstone that separated the geranium bed, on one side, from the rose plot, with the thyme border round it, on the other. The scent of the cut-out, crinkled geranium leaves, with the sparse lilac-hued blossoms sprinkled over them, always brought the Ivy Cottage atmosphere before her as something oppressive, having a faint suggestion of mustiness in its perfume. She could see that old Mr. and Mrs. Frost were at tea—not afternoon tea (a frivolity they had never sanctioned), but their third solid repast of the day, with an accompaniment of highly-varnished fried smoked

trumpeter, boiled eggs, muffins and crumpets, and grace before and after. She hesitated before breaking in upon this simple repast. The front-door was of wood, covered with paint blisters—of the kind that the idle hands of errand boys that would have been anathematized by Dr. Watts found it fascinating to finger and press down. She stood there a long time before she could make up her mind to knock. She could see through the transparent blinds her father-in-law lighting his pipe, and her mother-in-law draining the remains of the hot-water jug into the tea-pot, of which the contents would probably serve, in their doubly diluted form, for the maid-of-all-work, an orphan from the New Town Asylum, whom Mrs. Frost had undertaken to find and clothe in return for her general services. If murder was treated by the witty De Quincey as one of the fine arts, parsimony as a fine art might almost have served as the theme of an essay on Mrs. Frost's housekeeping. It was her aim in life to illustrate the truth of the saying that "enough is as good as a feast" in the smallest details of her domestic arrangements; and as there was no one—least of all the New Town school orphan—capable of giving her the *réplique* in the words of the more generous French proverb, which declares that "Ce qui est juste assez n'est pas assez," she went through life in the firm persuasion that her economies erred, if anything, on the side of liberality.

Eila hesitated for a long time in the gloom before making up her mind to enter. She had come with the design of giving her parents-in-law a hint of the family intentions; but her courage failed her as she pictured the manner in which her tidings would be received. A journey to Europe was a project that, from old Mr. and Mrs. Frost's point of view, should be considered for long years before it was put into execution. It was a matter to be talked over, pondered over, and plentifully prayed over by turns. Eila's heart beat high with disagreeable anticipation, when she knocked at last at the door, and entered the little parlour, after bestowing a passing smile of friendly recognition upon the orphan.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Frost looked up from the tea-table with

staid welcome as she entered ; the welcome, however, was tempered by a large reserve of disapproval. She wore the very muslin-crowned hat she suspected of figuring as a *pièce de conviction* in old Mrs. Frost's eyes, but I fear she had forgotten all about the circumstance now. It was pushed far back behind her head, like a white aureole, exposing a natural front of closely-packed, waving, silky dark hair, divided by a gleaming thread of narrow white parting. Her throat was bared in all its white and slender perfection ; two white and red roses dangled upon her breast, fastened by her brooch to her open sailor collar. There were more roses in her belt—a boy's belt—encircling a round and supple waist, guiltless of stays. The firm contour of arms and bust was apparent through her washed-out blue cotton frock—her house attire, to all appearance—in which she had walked across the hills this warm summer evening. Old Mrs. Frost was as great a contrast to young Mrs. Frost as crabbed age to youth in its springtide. Her appearance was that of a stout, elderly lady of a not over-indulgent habit of mind. She wore a black lace cap, with the ribbons thrown back, and displayed thereby a large double chin. Her customary expression was one of surprised displeasure—though this might have been owing more to the peculiar shape of her eyebrows, which, instead of descending with age, seemed to have climbed up behind her spectacles, than to her normal mental attitude. She had no doubt been handsome once on a time, though in a hard way. Her hair was iron-gray, and abundant still beneath her cap. Her skin, puckered though it was by the hand of Time, had yet a fresh-coloured, healthy hue. She did not look as though she had grown more tolerant with advancing years, rather the contrary ; and it was probable that she had never erred on the side of over-indulgence, even at the age we choose to characterize as tender.

Mr. Frost's elderliness in no way resembled his wife's. His hair and beard were white and bristly, his face was red, and his eyes were a bright blue. He might have served as a perfect impersonation upon the stage of a benevolent elderly gentleman, if it had not been for an unexpected

trick of dilating and drawing up his nostrils whenever he emphasized his opinions, a thing which he found occasion to do at least a dozen times in the day. Young people found him intimidating to talk to on this account. They were never sure whether he was not sneering at them, but he was probably unaware of the gesture himself.

Eila's parents-in-law would both have lent themselves easily to caricatural purposes, from the fact that by drawing two angular eyebrows surmounting a pair of spectacles to represent the one, and two dilating nostrils surmounting a pair of harsh moustaches to represent the other, a complete suggestion of their personalities would have been immediately conveyed. Mr. Frost was very careful in his choice of language. All his phrases were uttered with a careful deliberation that made them sound as if they had been written out and studied previously, but his omission of the aspirate in the words that he emphasized most strongly somewhat took from the dignity of his utterance. He prided himself, nevertheless, upon being a purist in the matter of pronunciation, and would take Eila and her brothers and sisters to task every time he detected, or fancied that he detected, a colonial "heow" or "keow" from their lips, in lieu of a mouth-filling "how" and "cow." He held the Bible and Milton to be the only worthy deposits of the knowledge suited to human needs, and drew largely upon both sources, not only in the extempore prayers that he pronounced morning and evening before a congregation composed of his wife and the orphan, but in his everyday speech as well.

"Good-evening, papa, and good-evening, Mrs. Frost," was Eila's hurried greeting in accompaniment of the movement by which she presented her blooming cheek, cooled by the evening breeze, to her father-in-law's bristly moustache, and to her mother-in-law's withered cheek in turn, before seating herself upon the aforesaid shiny horsehair sofa in the corner. "I'm not going to disturb you for long."

"You've never come over alone?" cried old Mrs. Frost reprovingly. To open a conversation with the young by some form of reproach was a time-honoured habit with

Eila's mother-in-law. "I wonder what you and your mother can be thinking of?"

"It was quite light when I started," replied Eila colouring. She could not feel it was like telling a lie not to tell the *whole* truth at this moment. "It's all right indeed."

"Well, now, I'm not so sure it *is* all right," interposed her father-in-law testily, his nostrils receding visibly. He had been taking a preliminary pull at his pipe, still seated in his place before the table, and was looking at his daughter-in-law, not quite as Wordsworth looked at the little maid, whose "beauty made him glad," for he was by no means sure that the outward graces of his son's wife, situated as he and she were, could be considered altogether as a matter for rejoicing. "I ain't so sure by any means," he repeated; "young women didn't use to be so independent in *my* day. D'ye think it's seemly, mother?" turning to his wife, "for a young gentlewoman to go roaming the country alone at this hour o' the night. I've 'ad occasion to remark upon it to Eila more than oncè already, but she don't seem to listen to *me*."

He gave a vigorous puff at his pipe, inhaling the smoke with unduly open nostrils. Eila's colour deepened visibly. What would she have given for the courage to say, "You are mistaken, I am not alone; Mr. Acton is taking care of me"! But moral courage was not Eila's strong point. Before physical danger she was brave, but she shrank within herself when there was a risk of being reprimanded. Besides, if she were to avow that she had a companion now, after concealing the fact with malice prepense at the outset, the avowal might lend a colour to the unworthy suspicions that she half suspected her father-in-law of harbouring. She coloured, therefore, and held her peace.

But if Eila was silent, old Mrs. Frost made full use of the opportunity. If she was not lavish in other respects, she was, at least, unstinting in the matter of bestowing what she called a piece of her mind upon her friends. It was such a large piece, and she gave it so often, that the wonder was that there was any left for herself. Upon the present

occasion Eila was made the luckless recipient of this largesse.

"If you want a piece of my mind," said old Mrs. Frost very angrily to her husband, "I don't countenance any of Eila's goings-ons——"

"Goings-on, Martha," interrupted her husband dictatorially, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Goings-on, or whatever you like to call it, it's all the same," said old Mrs. Frost, more angrily still; "stravaghing over the hill morning, noon, and night, that's about all she's fit for. I've never seen her with a needle in her hand all the time I can remember."

She moved the teacups with an angry, rattling noise, as though to silence any disclaimer on the part of the culprit. But Eila made no disclaimer. She said nothing, indeed, to exculpate herself; she sat quite still, with her hat on her lap, her head a little bent forward, the least suggestion of scorn in the bitter half-smile that hovered around her pretty lips. She was glad now that she had come with something to say which would divert these paltry accusations, heaped upon her by her Puritan relatives, into another channel. She had intended when she came, a few minutes ago, to lead gently up to her startling news. Now she meant to hurl it at old Mr. and Mrs. Frost without a word of warning.

"Well, I won't have much more chance of stravaghing over the hill for the present," she said, with just a faint inflexion of an American drawl that might possibly have been adopted for the occasion; "for I'm going right away home, and mother, too, and the whole lot of us, before the month's out!"

To a very acute hearing there would have been a hint of mingled triumph and terror discernible beneath the covert insolence of her tones. The old people, however, heard nothing but the announcement itself, and it had an effect which can only be adequately rendered by the expressive French word *foudroyant*.

Old Mrs. Frost was transfixed in the act of placing the vertebræ of the smoked trumpeter with its pendant scraps upon a kitchen-plate for the orphan's supper. Old Mr.



Frost stared solemnly over the pipe suspended in his hand. Both looked as though they suspected their daughter-in-law of having taken leave of her senses.

"I don't rightly apprehend your meaning," said old Mr. Frost at last, still eyeing her severely. "I must trouble you to repeat that last sentence again."

Eila looked up and returned his gaze undaunted.

"I said we were going home!" she repeated defiantly. "We've taken our passages in the *Queen of the South*."

Though it was hateful to her to give offence in any direction, once she was roused she was capable of maintaining her ground. Nevertheless, the angry astonishment depicted in the double pair of eyes directed towards her was more than she could encounter. She looked once more at the carpet, turning the muslin-crowned hat awkwardly round in her lap the while.

"Well, I never heard the like!" her mother-in-law exclaimed with a gasp. "I think you and your mother must be clean out of your mind. Going home, going to leave Cowa! How do you expect to pay for it, I'd like to know!"

"Yes, that's the question!" broke in her husband. "Where's the money to come from?"

Their attitude was that of accuser and judge in one. But the culprit was not to be intimidated. Perhaps she found it easier to speak now that the gauntlet was definitely thrown down.

"We're not going to ask anyone to assist us," she said quietly; this time there was nothing but colonial deliberateness in her tones. "The journey will be the only expense, and we've saved up enough for that. When we get home we shall manage well enough. We won't be any worse off there than here. Rather better, for everyone says living is less expensive in Europe—in England, any way. Then Willie can look out for something to do, and so can I, and Dick can study art, and Mamy have singing lessons."

"Well, it seems you've got it all cut and dried," interrupted old Mrs. Frost sourly; "but if you want a piece of *my* mind, it's my opinion you're a pack of fools. I only

hope your mother's not going to have the managing of it all, for your sakes."

Eila's cheeks flushed. Never had she been made to colour so often within so short a space of time.

"We are entirely satisfied with mother's arrangements, thank you," she said quickly.

Her breast was heaving. It was the second time this evening that her mother's judgment had been called in question. Why, she asked herself, should she be so frequently called upon to do battle in behalf of her daughterly sentiment? Why should it be enough that her mother harboured the idea of going home to bring apparent discredit upon the scheme in the eyes of everybody she spoke to? How unjust and narrow-minded the world was, and how these experiences intensified her longing to escape to that larger, freer life towards which her aspirations had so long tended, far out of reach of the carping criticism to which the family was ever subjected in this contracted little spot on the very outskirts of the civilized world.

Old Mrs. Frost was not silenced, for she grumbled something that sounded like "You're as great a fool as your mother," but her further comments were stopped by her husband, who had been ruminating the speech of which he now delivered himself.

"As regards your journey 'ome," he said (it was only when he was solemnly emphatic that he discarded the aspirate so resolutely), "as regards your journey 'ome, there is one point you have not duly considered. Granting you have the means, which I take the liberty of doubting, 'ow are you going to get the necessary permission from your 'usband to absent yourself?"

Eila looked up quickly. What she saw was the old man's face bent forward towards her in denunciation; his eyes bluer, his face redder, his nostrils more distended than ever. She was so taken aback by the spectacle that she continued for a few seconds to turn the hat round without replying to his question.

"You think it's a very easy thing, no doubt," he continued, with grave reproach, "to turn your back on all your

dooties, though it's no light matter, let me tell you, to leave 'ome and country, and become wanderers on the face of the earth. But you've got special responsibilities of your own you seem to need reminding of. I ain't going to say what I think of your mother's conduct, nor yet to offer her my counsel. She'd be nigh certain to disregard it if I did; she was ever stiffnecked and rebellious to advice, and for the matter of that, none of you are much better. Still, it is my bounden duty to offer you a word of warning. I'm in a kind of a way the delegate of your husband's authority, and I forbid you in his name to run away from him. What call have you to seek to put twelve thousand miles of sea between you and him? The Lord in His mercy has thought fit to afflict him; He has laid His 'and upon him more 'eavily than others. Is that a reason why you should want to desert him? It's the reason why you should stop quietly at home, if you were anything of a wife. Stop at 'ome, and cover yourself with sackcloth and ashes, and maybe the Lord will see fit to restore him to you. There's no saying when the burden may be lifted from him: he might come back to his right mind from one day to another. And what do you suppose his feelings would be when he's told that the wife the Lord gave him to be a helpmeet to him has gone away in the vain pursuit of pleasure to t'other end of the world? 'Who the Lord hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' Do you bear in mind where those words come from, Eila?"

"They come from the Bible," replied Eila, in an off-hand tone.

For a moment she seemed to reflect upon something she had it in her mind to say, for there was a little frown on her forehead; her eyes were fixed upon the faded rosebuds stamped upon the cabbage-green background of the worn drugget at her feet. Then she raised her head resolutely, and encountering her father-in-law's severe glance in full, said, in firm tones:

"It is better to speak out at once, Mr. Frost. You have one rule of life, and I have another. We could never look at things in the same way. I am afraid it would be as im-

possible for me to see them with your eyes as it would be for you to see them with mine, especially as regards my duties and responsibilities. I have duties, I know, and responsibilities too; but they seem to me all to lie in my own home—my mother's home, I mean. If I had any other home it might be different, but I haven't. I never can have another. If—if my husband" (she pronounced the words with visible effort) "should get better, it would be my duty to be near him. But nothing—no power in the world—could ever induce me to live with him again; and as things are now, it is not even necessary that I should be near him. He does not want me; he does not even know me. If any change should come later, and I were needed, why, I could be telegraphed for——"

"Telegraphed for!" broke in old Mrs. Frost, with an air of supreme disdain. "Hark at her, father! That's Eila all over! We've to telegraph for madam at the other end o' the world, and every word costing a pound if it costs a penny, and we're to pay for it out of our own pockets, I suppose."

"No, no," interrupted her daughter-in-law, with an impatient sigh; "of course I would pay for it myself."

"Oh, you'd pay for it yourself, would you!" cried her mother-in-law, angrier than ever. "Since when have you had money to throw away on telegrams, pray? A body might suppose you had a gold-mine of your own, to hear you talk! And you'd pay for your passage out the same way, I suppose?"

"There are always ways of coming out," said Eila carelessly. "One goes as companion or nurse if nothing better offers. Anyhow, we're tired of this place, and we mean to leave it. We have prospects in Europe—I can't tell you exactly what they are"—old Mrs. Frost sniffed wrathfully—"but we really have them; and even if they were to come to nothing, we should find work of some kind to fall back upon. I should not mind working for my bread in Europe. I could not do it here; people would not take it seriously."

"A fine lot of work you'll do, I'm thinking," observed old Mr. Frost, with a backward movement of the nostrils

that mightily resembled a sneer. "You won't have much thought of anything but vain amusement once you get away, I'm pretty sure of that. It's pleasure you're going after, not work. Don't tell me!"

"I hope we shall find work and pleasure too," retorted Eila quietly. "I hope we may learn a good deal and enjoy a good deal on our travels. That's what we're going for, at any rate. You know I never could see that liking to do a thing was a reason for not doing it, as you are always telling me; it always seemed the best reason of all for doing it, as long as nobody else was to be harmed by it."

"That is the talk of an unregenerate soul," declared her father-in-law, shaking the ashes out of his pipe with gloomy deliberateness. "If you took any heed of what the Scriptures teach us, you'd talk in a different way. What are the things we most of us hanker after in this world? Isn't it the gratification of our carnal desires? And because we like it, is that the reason we're going to give way to 'em? That's the devil's plea, not the Lord's. What was the purpose of the Almighty, do you suppose, in sending you into the world? Wasn't it just so as you might 'ave an opportunity of preparing for a better state? And how are you to do that if it isn't by mortifying the flesh, which the devil makes use of to lead you into sin? Mark my words. Whenever you set your mind upon an earthly object you may make sure it's a sinful one. It's bound to be sinful. What you've got to do is to pray for strength to keep your mind from dwelling on it; you must lift your thoughts from earthly things, and fix them on things unseen. Just think a minute how you're placed now. Your first duty is to your husband, whom you've sworn before the altar to honour and obey—ay, and to cleave to for better or worse till death us do part. There's your dooty—the most solemn dooty of all—clear mapped out before you: 'For better or for worse'—if you can't have the better, you've sworn to put up with the worse. But what have you got it in your head to do? The first temptation that comes in your way finds you ready to throw your dooty to the winds, and go gadding over the world in search of your own amusement."

"Eila was always fond of gallivanting," remarked old Mrs. Frost parenthetically, while her husband paused to take breath.

She had been paring the small square of butter she had transferred from her own plate to the orphan's, until it had assumed the consistency of a mere flake.

"Yes, gadding after amusement," reiterated the old man, solemnly. "But take my word for it, if you go 'ome, it won't bring you happiness. You'll live to repent it in more ways than one. You're going to run counter to all the laws human and Divine, and you haven't counted the cost. Maybe you won't find it out till it's too late. If there was no other objection, there's the false position you're going to put yourself in. I don't mix much with the world, but I've seen enough in my time to know what I'm saying now. I'm advising you for your own good. If you've no thought of your husband, you might have some for yourself. I tell you there's nought more derogatory to the dignity of a young married woman than to go roaming over the world by herself. You won't have such an easy time of it as you think. You'll be taken in right and left, and the people as you'd like to be friends with won't have anything to say to you. I know the world. Folks won't believe as there ain't somethin' in the background to hide when they see a parcel of women wandering about by themselves."

Eila's cheeks glowed with indignation.

"We won't be a parcel of women by ourselves. We have the boys; and even if we hadn't, do you think I should mind what people said? If they were so narrow-minded as to think that a lady and her children—a *widow* lady, too—were doing anything so extraordinary in travelling about just to please themselves, they would not be the kind of people whose opinion we should be likely to trouble about."

"They'll make you trouble, whether you will or not. I don't say there's anything extraordinary in ladies travelling a bit by themselves, if they've a mind to see the world—though I think they're better at 'ome myself—as long as they've got a settled 'abitation to go back to, and a banker

to draw upon to pay their bills ; but that's not the case with you. You know quite well your mother is going to break up her 'ouse without the means to set up a fresh one. And when folks can't afford to have a settled 'ome, and yet keep shifting about, do you know what the law calls them ? It calls them vagrants—that's what it calls 'em."

He was so angry, that his nostrils were almost like those of a Japanese mask. He had not thought of weighing his words before he delivered himself of this denunciation. Eila was angry too ; her soft dark eyes were shining. Twice she essayed to speak, and when she broke the silence at last, you might have detected in her voice a half-hysterical quaver, that spoke of deeply-wounded susceptibilities.

"You have no right to call us vagrants, Mr. Frost," she said, "even if it is your opinion that we cannot afford to travel. What we have to spend is our own affair, and as long as we don't ask for assistance, it is nobody's business to criticise the way in which we may choose to live."

"You think I don't know what you've got of your own, and just how far it'll take you," replied her father-in-law, nothing abashed. "You'll be begging in the streets before you've done ; but, as I said before, your mother is a head-strong woman. As long as I've known her, she's had a down on the colonies. She's always been what one may call inimical to them"—the word pleased him, and he repeated it with emphasis—"yes, inimical to them. Haven't I heard her with my own ears deriding our native productions ? 'Trees, Mr. Frost!'" He made an attempt to mimic her mother's voice, of which Eila feigned, though not quite successfully, to appear loftily unconscious. "'Trees! you 'ave no trees in Tasmania, or fish! Fish! I've never tasted *real* fish since I left England!'" And she has succeeded in inoculating—yes, in *inoculating* you with her prejudices. You've always been unsettled, and complaining of this or that. You've none of you known when you were well off. And now she's got her own way at last, and she's going to drag you all off on a wild-goose chase to Europe under the pretence of showing you the world. If you're wise, you'll make a stand against it."

"What! advise mother not to leave Tasmania, when we're all so anxious to go!" said Eila.

A sense of the utter hopelessness of bringing her husband's parents to understand or sympathize with any of her own individual wants and aspirations was the feeling uppermost in her mind. "I am young," she thought to herself. "I have the misfortune to be cut off from all the dreams that girls of my age so often harbour. I must not think as they do of being a wife and a mother. If I meet a man who seems to care for me, as Reginald does, I must force myself to remember that there is a poor lunatic shut away in the asylum, whose property I am, and to whom the law gives rights over me, although the only use he would make of them, if he were free, would be to strangle me. It is all as hard as it can be. But there is still a home life into which I can throw myself. To travel about, to see Europe with my mother and brothers and sisters, even if we had to pinch and scrape a little, would be a great happiness. And these people would deprive me of it if they could, and take it as a matter of course that I should grow old and withered in this dreary place, with all my senses and faculties slowly starving to death the whole time. And yet Mr. Frost is a good man, and his wife is a good woman in her way, and they would help anyone who was in real trouble, I suppose. And me they would coldly condemn to a life of wretchedness and stagnation. They would not even be able to understand me if I told them how I feel about it. Why is it, I wonder, that to interfere with the liberty of other people seems quite justifiable to persons one considers *good*? For, after all, what wretchedness it may cause! I believe it may spoil one's life far more than deeds the world considers wrong."

"What would you have me do, Mr. Frost?" she said at the close of this reverie.

Her voice had lost its offended accents, but there was something dull and hopeless in its tone. Her father-in-law crossed over from the tea-table to the green-and-purple-lozenged arm-chair, whence his utterances always seemed to take an additional *ex-cathedra* importance.



"You ask me what I would have you do, Eila?" he said. "Well, I would have you take the stand of a Christian woman. You're not a giddy girl any longer, or you oughtn't to be, any way. If you've got no heart and no conscience, why, then, you may go to Europe; but the blessing of the Lord won't rest upon your undertaking. You may turn your back upon all your responsibilities and all your dooties, but you won't rid yourself of 'em in that way. They'll pursue you wherever you are; they'll rise up and confront you in the night-time; they'll turn into nettles and sting you."

He paused in quest of a fresh metaphor whereby to drive his threats home.

"But how can they pursue me if I don't feel them, don't see them, don't recognise them?" expostulated Eila. "You tell me they are here; I say they are with my family."

"You can sit there, and tell me your first duty is to your family, when you've got a husband belonging to you!"

"But I haven't got one!" cried Eila. Her lips trembled as she spoke. "Do you mean to say I could be with him now? You know yourself it's impossible!"

"And who says it's going to be impossible next year, or next month, or next week? The doctor 'll tell you he might be better any day. Besides, as long as he's within reach, you can't put him out of your mind altogether; but once you turn your back upon him, it'll be different. When you're three or four months' distance from him, you'll be like to forget you've got a husband at all. Supposing the Lord should work a miracle in his favour, and restore him all on a sudden to his right mind, the first thing he'll do will be to ask for his wife. Why, he's got his intervals even now when he's rational. Don't tell me! he's more knowing than folks make out. He knows when you haven't been nigh him for ten days just as well as I do. Ten to one, if you go away altogether, he'll begin to fret after you. Don't turn a deaf ear to the voice of his old father pleading for him, Eila. If you listen to what your heart and your conscience bid you do, you won't desert him now. Stop along here with us, if your mother's set upon

going. What she does is no business o' mine; I've nought to do with her comings and goings. She's got her own notions; it's a pity they ain't the sort that sensible people can approve. But that's neither here nor there. Let her go her own way, and you stay behind with us; we'll make a place for you. If your mother turns her back on her home, your rightful place is under this roof; it's nowhere else. I've got my responsibility, too. When the Lord sees fit to restore my son, I've got to be able to give you back to him without any misgiving. I must be able to say, 'There, my son; there's your wife just as you left her. Take her to your heart again, my lad; she's deserving of it—she's your true and faithful wife.'

He stopped, overcome with his own emotion, and looked at his daughter-in-law with quivering nostrils. Eila's head was bent; her fingers were nervously crumpling the muslin border of the hat on her knees. Her cheeks were flushed, and there was a threatening humidity in her downcast eyes.

"Don't turn a deaf ear, my child," he continued, following up the advantage he had gained, and too much moved himself to perorate according to his wont. "Listen to an old man who hasn't many more years of life left him. It's the voice of the Lord speaking through me to you, Eila. You may believe it, my child. Your mother has other children to keep her company, and they haven't any other claims as you have. You stop here quietly with us; you'll be a daughter to us, and the blessing of the Almighty will rest upon you. Who knows but what He may restore your husband to you in the end to reward your sacrifice! And you're closer to him than to anybody else; you're bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. What did Ruth do when she had to choose between her husband's people and her own? If you like, I'll read you the chapter about it next time you come over. You stay here with us; you won't have frivolity and dissipation. Leave that for them as forgets there's an hereafter. But you'll have the peace of the Lord, which passeth all understanding. You'll be the light of our home, and we've been lonely enough since our poor lad was afflicted. Give me your hand upon it, my dear, and go and

kiss your mother-in-law, who's waiting over there to take you to her 'art."

He stopped short, and for a whole half-minute Eila sat motionless, looking at the ground. A curious struggle was taking place in her mind. A fleeting but clearly defined vision of the consequences of yielding to her father-in-law's importunities, and rushing upon a life of self-imposed sacrifice hard enough and bitter enough in all conscience to exercise the sway over her imagination that a life of voluntary martyrdom holds out to us in our moments of spiritual exaltation, was shaping itself before her.

As she sat, her imagination filled in all the details immediately. She saw herself arrayed in a black serge frock, with a loosely knotted girdle and a crape collar, moving about this hopeless, hateful little house, a kind of domestic guardian angel—weeding the geranium plots, cleaning the kerosene lamp, making pilgrimages to the New Norfolk Asylum, reading the *Sunday Times* to old Mrs. Frost in the evening, and fading away into an early and picturesque tomb, or, better still, a funeral urn, if her narrow-minded relatives would only respect her last wish and have her cremated in preference to being buried.

But before the half-minute was quite at an end, the mocking and sceptical part of her nature was scoffing at the mystic and enthusiastic part of it. Notwithstanding all, she felt a certain secret sense of triumph at the evidence of her father-in-law's desire to keep her under his roof. Though even this was not enough to satisfy her entirely: she would fain have brought him to own that she was right in her desire to go away. Eila not only loved to do as she liked, which is a weakness that most of us might own to; she also loved to be approved in the doing of it. She felt it would be a drawback to her satisfaction if old Mr. and Mrs. Frost could not be induced to own that it was justifiable and right, to say nothing of its being pleasant, that she should accompany her family to Europe. But how was this desirable end to be accomplished? Their points of view, as she had truly said, were wide as the poles asunder; or, rather, they were like two different points of the com-

pass. Theirs had the icy north in view. It was that of an explorer who seeks to attain the ocean of eternal peace, lit by the lofty Polar star, across ice-bound waters and desolate tracts of snow. Hers pointed to the warm west—to regions where “it is always afternoon,” and the traveller may lie and rest in languorous forgetfulness of what lies beyond. How could a meeting-point be found between these two? Nevertheless, it was Eila’s desire to reconcile the irreconcilable. “To know all would be to forgive all,” says the French proverb. If her father-in-law could but know, as she knew them herself, the longings that beset her youth—the craving to escape from the sad, monotonous associations of her present clouded existence—he might possibly find excuses for her in his heart. But what could his seventy years of life, with all their boasted experience, know of such sensations as hers? His lozenge-tapestried arm-chair, his Bible and Milton, his pipe, old Mrs. Frost’s comments upon the wicked wastefulness of the orphan, answered to all his requirements. “I can put myself into *his* place,” reflected Eila bitterly; “why cannot he put himself into mine? Can it be that, when one is young, imagination supplies the place of experience, and that it is really easier for me to understand his needs and feelings than for him to enter into mine?” But aloud she said:

“Don’t ask me to make up my mind, please, until I have thought it all over. Perhaps I might not stay away longer than a year. In any case, I could not bear to disappoint them all at home now.”

“And what may not happen in a year?” she thought to herself. She was still of an age at which the deferring of a question for a whole year is almost tantamount to burying it altogether. “Events may happen that may change the whole position of things! And it will be so easy to write from home, and find a good reason for not returning, if the worst should come to the worst. So much easier than to find a satisfactory argument now! Besides, I can’t argue with my father-in-law; we start from two different stand-points. There is no means of bringing things home to his comprehension. I should have to make a complete con-

fession of faith, or want of it, and array Herbert Spencer and my duties to myself against the Scriptures and my duties to Mr. Frost's God. There is nothing for it but to temporize—and a year is soon gone by," she remarked suavely out loud.

"Who's going to pay your passage-money, that's what I want to know?" asked her mother-in-law sharply. Surprise and displeasure kept her eyebrows suspended high over her spectacles. Two conflicting ideas had been struggling for supremacy in old Mrs. Frost's mind. The first was the conviction that the housing of this radiant-looking girl, whom she called, to her sorrow, her daughter-in-law, would require an entire readjustment of all her exactly measured domestic economies; the other was the calculation that if the money that would otherwise be wasted upon travelling (for travelling, for travelling's sake, represented riotous wastefulness in old Mrs. Frost's eyes) should be poured into the Ivy Cottage exchequer, it would not only cover the required readjustments, but would leave a margin for the instituting of a "stocking" for future emergencies as well. "Who's going to pay your passage-money?" she repeated once more. "One would think, to hear you talk, you took no more account of fifty pounds than if they were so many pebbles!"

"I dare say I could save up," said Eila doubtfully. "I mean to earn my living, you know; but we'll talk it over next time if you like: I shall be over again soon."

She had risen from the sofa as she spoke, and, heedless of all remonstrances, was putting the muslin-crowned hat over her forehead. For the second time she advanced her rose cheek towards each withered face in turn, and, without waiting for an answering good-night, swept out of the room that she had brightened unconsciously with her presence, leaving it to the undisturbed occupation of its prickly sofa, its worsted settee, its prismatic mantel-ornaments, and its staid and severe proprietors.

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## CHAPTER IV.

## REGINALD MAKES AN AVOWAL.

THE darkness falling, as Longfellow has it, "from the wings of night" had settled upon the prospect while Reginald was waiting for Eila. He could only distinguish now the widespread expanse of harbour by the black space that rested upon it, bordered on the town side by the scanty lights that lined the wharves. At his feet the town-lamps twinkled in long irregular columns towards the dark heights around, and away upon the opposite shore he could faintly discern the feeble glimmer of the sparse illuminations of Kangaroo Point. Under cover of the obscurity he had ventured to creep closer to Ivy Cottage, and was hanging about the gate, like a thief in the night, when the muslin-covered hat emerged from the house. The transient glimpse he had of it before the front-door closed with a bang told him plainly that its owner was trying to beat a dignified retreat. The poise of the head was more erect than ever, and the swift, decided footsteps he heard immediately after upon the stone-flags confirmed him in his suspicion that young Mrs. Frost had been subjected to a more than usually distasteful piece of old Mrs. Frost's mind.

"Come quickly!" she said, feeling Reginald's presence more than seeing it, as the gate was opened for her passage through it, "or they will be sending someone after us. I did not tell them there was anybody waiting for me outside. Though, of course, they made a fuss about my coming alone." She had laid her hand within his arm as she spoke, and was walking briskly by his side over the uneven stones of the street in embryo that meandered away towards the hills. The tacit trust in him that the action implied filled him with a mute rapture. This was just what he loved—that she should take possession of him without so much as a "by your leave." He wondered whether her arm in the neighbourhood of his heart could feel how it had caused that treacherous member to beat, as he walked silently on, almost afraid to speak lest he should break the spell. "Yes,"

she went on, as he kept pace with her footsteps, rendered unconsciously swifter by her agitation, "my father-in-law opened the proceedings by lecturing me upon the proprieties; but he forgot all about them, and everything else, when I told him my news. Of course it made him angry, and Mrs. Frost, too. But, then, they see harm in everything. They make me feel like Topsy, 'mighty wicked anyhow.' If you could have heard how they tried to work upon my feelings to make me stay here with them instead of going home!"

"I knew they would never approve of that," said Reginald. He did not allow himself to entertain the smallest hope that the influence of the Ivy Cottage inmates would shake her in her resolution. "But is the matter really settled beyond all doubt?"

"Quite irretrievably settled; but I won't say *irretrievable*, because it sounds as though we were talking of a misfortune, whereas we are really *aux anges* at the prospect of going away. Even the wiseacre Willie, as you call him, is *almost* excited for once."

"If only the anticipation doesn't turn out the best part of it," said Reginald. "It's a curious fact, but I do believe your mother has filled all your minds with a kind of glorified image of England that will make the reality a disappointment when you come to see it. Have you read Plato? No? You know what his theory was, anyhow. I am sure that you imagine England is like Plato's perfect world—a place that contains the exemplar or archetype of all that you see as through a glass darkly in Tasmania. I've heard her declare that the fruit had no taste here, and the flowers no scent."

"Nor have they; the wild-flowers, at least. But what do you think? You are repeating almost word for word what Mr. Frost has been saying, only he did not mention Plato. But I am not afraid of being disappointed in England. The only trouble is that we shall have so little money—between three and four hundred pounds a year at the most. It won't enable us to live in the lap of luxury, will it?"

"It isn't enough," said Reginald gravely. "There are

six of you, and you can have no idea of what it costs to travel, especially for people who have to buy all their experience, which is often the most expensive part of travelling."

Eila was silent for an instant. Though it was too dark to see her face, Reginald felt sure that there was a half-mocking smile of disclaimer hovering on her lips. He had seen it there before upon occasions like the present one, when she set herself against some argument or representation that ran counter to her inclinations.

"What you say might apply to other people, but it doesn't frighten me for *us*. I don't think we're the same as most people. We all like nothing better than eggs and bread-and-butter. I believe we could live upon them. And you know we are all very healthy if we *are* a little morbid. Mother the same as the rest. And we think of going to Paris, to a place they call the Quartier Latin. We've been reading all about the places the students live in, and we mean to manage just as they do. Won't it be fun? The houses are ever so high, and there are beautiful little flats to be had for next to nothing quite at the top. That would suit us exactly."

"I hope they won't turn out to be flats in the air," he said grimly. "I've never been to Paris, but everyone I've ever met has led me to suppose that it was one of the most expensive places in the world."

"Not in the Quartier Latin part," she interrupted him, with the air of one most entirely familiar with the place; "and if the worst came to the worst, do you think we should be afraid to 'turn to,' as mother calls it, and do something for ourselves? I mean to go on with my painting, and Willie must find employment. Then, Dick is going to be a sculptor, and Mamy and Truca must have lessons. Mamy has quite a Jenny Lind voice, mother says. I wish we had some friends at home, though. I wish *you* could come and see us in our flat."

"What! I? I wish I could. Perhaps you would find me work, too. But I haven't a Jenny Lind voice, I'm afraid."



She laughed.

"You're not a bit convinced. I can hear it in the tone of your voice."

"No; I am very unhappy about you, if you want to know the truth. It seems to me you are walking deliberately into a trap without waiting to see whether you will be able to find a way out of it."

"But we won't want to get out of it if we're happy in it. Besides—besides——" She paused. "I wonder if I were to confide a great—a *very* great—a tremendously important secret to you—what you would say? They would never forgive me at home for telling you. It's the kind of family secret that we all talk about at home in mysterious whispers, like conspirators. We have a code of signals to explain when we want to talk of it. I told you about our going home, and that thereby hung a tale. Well, it hangs to the secret, and as you are the only person out of the family I can trust, I am going to tell you about it. But you must pledge yourself to the most absolute secrecy first. What is the promise that is the most binding you can think of?"

"My word," said Reginald simply.

"Is that all?" in tones of disappointment. "I thought there was some oath the Freemasons had about being rolled eternally in the flux and reflux of the ocean's tides."

"What do you know about the Freemasons?" he laughed; "but I will give you my hand upon it—there!"

She laid her soft, ungloved hand (gloves were Eila's aversion, excepting upon state occasions) within his own, and it required all his self-control not to clasp it in both his own, and tell her she was dearer to him than anything else in the world, and that the thought of her going away was breaking his heart.

"There! now that ceremony is over."

She had returned her hand to its place upon his left arm, and was allowing him to guide her fearlessly over the lonely track that led across the hillside to her home. A crescent moon was poised above them, with a faintly-defined watery globe cradled between its horns. There was the promise of another warm day in the faint haze that obscured the stars,

immeasurably distant in the far-reaching dome of the Tasmanian night sky. The "one particular star" that Reginald worshipped was close by his side; but in another sense was she not as remote from him as those intangible globes overhead, that, swinging through space, fraught with unsolvable mystery, seem to mock the dwellers upon earth by winking down upon them through the black void, like glittering eyes, that refuse to reveal the secret they hide? The young man felt a heavy load at his heart as he reflected how soon this bright particular star of his must vanish from his horizon. And how entirely her life would be separated from his own! The very face of the heavens would wear another aspect for her. He would never be able to picture her walking beneath the stars upon such an entrancing night as this. Her seasons of waking and sleeping, of heat and cold, of rising and going to rest, would all be different from his own. There would be no longer any possibility of community of sensation with her, such as even at a distance friends in the same hemisphere may experience.

And who would watch over her with loyal, unselfish love in that new strange world into which she was about to adventure herself? Hobart was dull and contracted, without doubt, but there was a restraining influence in the very contraction of its social atmosphere. No one here could escape the eye of Mrs. Grundy; and though Reginald had no great esteem for Mrs. Grundy himself, he liked to think that the woman he loved was held in check by her presence. The occasional revelations he had had of the Bohemian instincts of Eila and her belongings made him tremble for their future in Paris; besides which, they were all, to use a discourteous but most expressive adjective, *gullible* to a degree. Whittington, setting out for London to pick up gold in the streets of the great city, was not more innocent than they. In their enthusiasm for all things European, they were ready to be the dupes of the first adventurer they might encounter. Their poverty might be, indeed, a certain safeguard, but, then, Eila was too pretty not to attract notice. He wondered whether she had the least foreshadowing of the dangers that beset her path. What would he have given to be able to

watch over her like a knight errant on her travels? Here in Tasmania he had been content to let the days drift by without seeking a solution to his position in regard to her. As long as he could see her almost daily—as long as he could believe her to be heart free, he could find strength to wait until Time, the great unraveller of destinies, should work out an issue for him. He did not even ask himself whether Eila was aware of his absorbing love for her. In the peculiar position in which he found himself, he felt that he must dread any kind of catastrophe that would startle her out of the confidential, almost sisterly, relations she had gradually established with him. She must know, at least, he told himself, that he was in her power to do as she pleased with. There were days when the very frankness of her liking for him brought a chill of terror, lest under no circumstances whatever she could have loved him. But the sweetness of the unconstrained intercourse brought its compensating charm, and upon the very evening when Reginald received the crushing announcement that Eila was to leave him he had been schooling himself to set a guard on his lips and a bridle on his tongue, lest by some unconsidered word he should betray the passionate nature of his sentiment for her. And now he learned that all his resolutions would be in vain. Even the brotherly attitude that he tried so valiantly to maintain towards her would avail him nothing. She was going away from him, and his secret would remain locked away in his heart. He would never love or seek to love another woman.

“And there will be an end,” he thought to himself, “of all the hopes that I had staked my chances of happiness upon in this world. I expect I shall turn into one of those prosy old bores who live in rooms, and go down to read the papers at the club every afternoon. If it were not for my mother, I would go to sea again. It would need less courage to jump overboard than to face the life of utter stagnation that I see stretched before me in this dreary place. And all for what? Why must I see the woman I love dragged away to a shiftless and comfortless existence at the other end of the world? For whom and for what are two lives to be

sacrificed? Because a wretched maniac, shut up in the asylum, is called her husband. It is a monstrous injustice, based upon a false principle; it is a case in which a man should make use of his common-sense—one in which we ought to be, as St. Paul says, a law to ourselves. . . . But what if I were in the maniac's place? How would I feel towards the person who should take advantage of my misfortune—surely the worst that can befall a man—to steal my wife away from me? A man in the possession of his senses can look out for himself. Besides, madness may have its term like any other malady. How would I feel, in the same plight, to discover, when I came to my right mind, that my wife had gone over to a rival? But if I don't speak to Eila, others will be less scrupulous. Who knows, though she should never be able to return my love, whether the knowledge of it might not help and sustain her? To know there is someone absolutely and entirely her own: someone who asks for nothing more than to be allowed to put all he has at her disposal—his work, his purse, his very life—and who asks for no other reward than the one of making her path a little smoother for her; someone who separates her from all accidents of surroundings, circumstances, and conditions of life—nay, even from the very faults or follies she might fall into; someone who loves her very essence, her very being, independently of all change, physical or moral, that might overtake it. Surely the certainty of the existence of such a friend as this ought to be a support and a consolation——”

But Reginald's train of thought, which he did not formulate, however, in the foregoing words, was suddenly broken in upon by his companion's remark:

“Men are not curious like women. I've been waiting for you to say ‘Do tell!’ the whole of this time.”

“Well, I'll say it now—do tell! And see, we're not far from your home. Is not that a light moving across the veranda, down there?”

Though Cowa was on a hill, they were standing upon a yet higher slope of the same mountainous region, and looking down from it they could see the dimly defined outline

of the long quadrilateral garden running sideways down the declivity. A faint glimmer in front of the squat mass that represented the house was the light to which Reginald had made allusion.

"I shall never have time to tell it you all before we reach the house," she said.

"Not time! Then let us sit here on the ground and tell strange stories of the deaths of kings——"

"Not of kings," she laughed. "But there are plenty of deaths in it, I warn you."

She had seated herself as she spoke upon the prone trunk of a sawn gum-tree that lay in readiness to be carted down to town the following day.

Reginald sat next to her on the same trunk, after beating about the scrub in its vicinity to make sure that no ambulant snake had taken refuge there. Eila pulled off her hat, twisting it round in her lap mechanically as she narrated her story. The balmy night breeze lifted the soft rings of hair from her forehead and temples, and played, cool and gorse-scented, round her neck. Her voice had unconsciously assumed the true narrator's tone, and Reginald only interrupted her from time to time when it seemed to him that the details of her story were becoming more picturesque than precise.

"In the first place," she began, "you know the Chevalier's portrait, the one that hangs over the drawing-room mantelpiece?"

"The Chevalier's portrait! *Rather!*" he replied.

The superlative form of affirmation was not employed without sufficient justification. Who that had ever visited Cowa Cottage could remain ignorant of the Chevalier's portrait? It was an oil-painting of the end of the last century, and its bright, classic, somewhat hard perfection of design and colour seemed to point to it as belonging to the school of the great painter of revolutionary times—David. The dress was of a period anterior to the exaggerations of Merveilleux and Incroyables. It was of the accepted decorous type of a somewhat earlier period, much like that of an Usher of the Black Rod in a colonial Parliament in our own day, for it

consisted of black satin knee-breeches, and a black satin coat, with glittering buttons, opening upon a waistcoat of the same material, and a shirt with white lace ruffles down the front. A cocked hat, shoes with paste buckles, and a dangling sword, completed the costume, which was well set off by the aristocratic head of the wearer, a man of some forty years of age, with smooth fair hair drawn back into a queue behind the nape of the neck. This painting represented Mrs. Clare's maternal grandfather, and was as great an object of veneration in the Cowa household as though the latter had consisted of a Chinese family, and the Chevalier's effigy had been that of a pigtailed ancestor, before which they were accustomed to burn candles and let off crackers in token of their everlasting respect for it. The sentiment grew intenser with time, for the longer Eila's mother remained in exile, as she was accustomed to call her life in the colonies, the higher her estimation of the Chevalier's portrait seemed to grow. No profane hand was ever allowed to touch this sacred icon, and the Australian-Scotch servaut who "did" for the Clare family in more senses than one, would present herself upon cleaning days to Eila with the request that "Mistress Frost wud na forget the chif-fonier." It would have been as much as her place was worth to approach a sacrilegious duster to the picture on her own responsibility.

"Well, but do you know who the Chevalier *was*?" continued Eila, with a dignity that betrayed a latent sense of resentment at Reginald's emphatic assertion of his obvious knowledge of her ancestor.

"Who he was?" He paused for an instant's reflection. "Either your grandfather or your great-grandfather. But he couldn't have been your grandfather, now I come to think of it."

"My great-grandfather, the Chevalier de Merle. It means 'blackbird,' but that doesn't matter. It is his history you have to follow first. He belonged to a French family that lost their estates in the Revolution, and when he was a young man he went to India, and there he married a Begum; at least, we believe he married her."

"So you have an Indian ancestress!" exclaimed Reginald. "Dear me! what a number of things that accounts for to a believer in the theory of heredity!"

"Does it? What kind of things?" He could imagine she was slightly frowning behind the curtain of darkness. "You have sent me quite off the track now, for, naturally, it is more interesting to discuss one's self than anything else. I feel I can't go on until you have told me what my having a Begum ancestress accounts for."

"Do you really want to know? I shall have to be personal, only perhaps as it is so dark you won't mind. And then you needn't take all I say for Gospel, either. Perhaps you haven't studied the theory of heredity?"

"Not much. I suppose we are all more like our fathers and mothers than anybody else?"

"Or ought to be, according to the popular theory. But physiologists take account of much remoter relationships. They say that, reckoning a child's parents, together with the parents of those parents, backwards for ten generations, they find that two thousand separate individualities have each had their influence in moulding its nature. However, these two thousand individualities are not blended in equal proportions in the child. If that were so, we could reckon up the qualities of every one who is born with the same mathematical exactitude that we employ in calculating the ingredients of a new dish. But that is not the case. There is always an unknown quantity, or there is one particular ancestor who gives the lion's share in making up the new descendant. Then we have a case of atavism. Yours is *almost* a case of atavism, but not quite."

"Do you mean to tell me I am like a Begum?"

She was laughing, but there was a suggestion of dryness in her tones.

"Yes, I do; but a Begum grafted on to a European, which is something very different. First, there are your eyes. I have lived in the East, you know, and I have the certainty that nowhere away from the East can one find eyes like yours. One *must* connect them with the dark-skinned races. There are all kinds of eyes: les yeux verts, qui mènent aux

enfers; and les yeux bleus, qui vont aux cieux (excuse my pronunciation); but a Begum's eyes are quite different. There is something opaque, and dusky, and liquid, and indescribably soft about them; they are more lustrous than other eyes, and yet they have no hardness. Perhaps it is because they have such long, silky, sweeping lashes. In fact, they are Oriental eyes, and that is saying everything."

"It is saying too much, if you mean all that for my eyes. But I hope I don't 'feature' the Begum, as Mrs. Garth says."

"You do in your hair. I can't say of it:

" 'It's not her hair, for sure in that  
There's nothing more than common;'

for there is something much more than common in it."

"Oh, we all have good wigs in the family."

"Yes; but yours looks sometimes as though it were too heavy for your head. And I am sure you may thank the Begum for the way in which it clusters and waves all about your forehead in those silky, shining masses. And you may thank her, too, for being made as you are—so wonderfully straight and supple, I mean; no, more than supple: lithe is the word. I know now where the Red Indian stride comes from! It must come from whole generations of ancestresses who carried chatties poised on their heads. Don't be offended. They couldn't all be Begums, you know; and I am going back, far back, into the mists of time."

"I am not offended. Far from it. I think it is very amusing. Only we are not perfectly certain my great-grandfather did marry the Begum, and that is where the dreadful part of the story comes in, for, you see, he had a daughter in India, who was my grandmother—mother's own mother. She was taken home by her father, the Chevalier de Merle, when he returned to Europe. She was quite a child then still. And the family would not acknowledge the Begum, who was dead, or the Indian connection at all; and it could not be proved that the marriage was anything but a Mohammedan marriage, if it was even that!"

"If it was even that!" echoed Reginald doubtfully.

In his heart he was inclined to look upon the title of



Begum in connection with Eila's ancestress as a polite figure of speech. The old Chevalier had probably allowed his fancy to be taken captive by a seductive Nautch girl of no acknowledged caste or rank, and had had his paternal instincts stirred to life by the child born of the liaison, to the point, as it appeared, of bringing her away with him to Europe.

"But he brought something besides his daughter. He brought a beautiful precious stone—a ruby—that had once belonged to the Begum, and that ought to prove that she was a genuine Begum, oughtn't it?" continued young Mrs. Frost, replying to Reginald's unspoken surmises, almost as though she had had to contend against the same form of misgiving herself. "It must have been a beautiful stone, for mother has an imitation—but only an imitation—of it in glass. My great-grandfather especially desired that this ruby should descend to the Indian branch of the family, to the daughters. It was my grandmother's, then it was to be my mother's, and then——"

"Then it was to be yours." He finished the sentence for her.

"Yes, but that does not matter. One would not think about that. But I am going to show you how it happened that our branch of the family never had the ruby at all. My little grandmother was put to school, a convent-school in England, and my great-grandfather married again; we all say, at least, that it was a second marriage. He married an Englishwoman, too. They lived in England after that. They had left France for good, and they had children. Well, my poor little grandmother was kept very much in the background in her convent-school, though I believe the Chevalier would have liked to have her very often at the house. One day he died quite suddenly, and then they sent for Maya—that was my grandmother's name—and they made her feel she was a kind of outcast now. Her father's second wife was like the stepmothers in Grimm's Tales. It was she who had the care of the ruby, and who ought to have given it to my grandmother. But what do you think she did? She told the child to choose between

this heirloom and the portrait of her father, the very painting of the Chevalier that hangs over our mantel-shelf at Cowa. Of course, poor little Maya chose the portrait, and cried over it as though her heart would break. They sent her back with that to the convent-school, and her step-mother paid for her education, on condition she should give lessons and try to keep herself later. And she did. But the very first place she went to, the son of the people fell in love with her. She was married to him. He was a Unitarian preacher called James Willett, and my grandmother and he lived in London after they were married, and lived there all their lives."

"And your mother was their only child?"

"The only one that lived. She married our father in England, but they emigrated soon after to Tasmania. Her parents were both dead then. But, meanwhile, the De Merles, the collateral branch—that is the right word, isn't it?—my grandmother's half-brothers and sisters, you know, had been marrying and having children, too. When my mother was a child, she used to hear *her* mother speak of them, though she never saw them. The ruby went to one of them called Pierre, and after he died we believe it went to his son Hubert, who must be over forty by this time. Where he is now we don't know. It seems that he was a wanderer for a long time, and that finally he settled in Paris. We have never been able to find out exactly, but we have a plan of looking him up and making this proposal to him. Mother thinks he would be only too glad to accept it, if he has a conscience, and if he is rich, as we suppose. We mean to propose that he should give up the heirloom, which was intended for the girls of the family, in exchange for the original portrait of the Chevalier, which we are going to take home for the purpose. The picture is valuable, too, of course; but perhaps not quite so valuable to us as the ruby would be, considering how many of us there are with nothing but mother's little income to depend upon. We have all our plans laid. First, we are going to discover this Hubert de Merle, then to show him the picture, and tell him the whole story. We have family letters—yellow old things,

folded over, with the address outside, and no envelope—so funny, you can't think! no stamps, either—and these will prove that our story is a true one. I should think M. de Merle would want to make restitution when he hears all. He would feel that his grandmother had taken an unfair advantage of ours—a little girl, too. Don't you think he would?"

"He might," said Reginald dubiously; "but, you see, you are not even sure that he has any existence at all excepting in your mother's imagination. I don't like to damp your ardour by matter-of-fact objections, but you do seem to be building upon a very shadowy foundation. Let me see. This M. de Merle, if he is alive, is a cousin of your mother's, or a half-cousin at any rate, so he must be a kind of second half-cousin of yours?"

"If he acknowledges the cousinship at all. But you know our grandmother was really cast off by all her home connections. So the only credentials we have are the Chevalier's portrait and the imitation ruby."

"But, tell me, why has the idea been taken up just now?" objected Reginald. "Did you never discuss it in your father's lifetime?"

"Y—yes!" the answer came slowly and with evident reluctance. "We did, but not often. Poor papa! he was so wonderfully good and kind, but he was rather matter-of-fact. Mother used to tell him he was what she called *terre-à-terre*, but she never says it of him now. However, I am afraid he looked upon the ruby rather as moonshine. It was his opinion that we had no legal grounds to go upon, and he said we had better not let our imaginations run upon impractical dreams. But mother always kept the story in her mind; she thinks M. de Merle would be only too glad to repair the wrong he did (or, rather, the wrong his grandmother did) to our branch of the family."

"Why doesn't she write to him about it, then?"

"Well, she did once; but how can one be sure the letter reached? Besides, what is writing compared with seeing and talking to people themselves?"

"I see you are quite of your mother's way of thinking,"

said poor Reginald, less reassured than ever by this new evidence of what he was inclined to look upon as almost crazy optimism on young Mrs. Frost's part; "and I can't say how grateful I am to you for telling me the whole story. Especially as I must own to being matter-of-fact, too. I can't help it. A primrose by the river's brim was always a yellow primrose to me, and nothing else. But now that you have trusted me so far, will you trust me a little bit farther? I have my secret, too. I have carried it about with me longer than you could imagine, and I dare say I would have found the strength to carry it to the end if it were not for this sudden news about your going away. That seems to alter everything. Perhaps I am not justified in telling it to you even now. I cannot say that, but I feel I must let you know it. Who knows? It might give you the confidence in me I want you so much to feel when you are away, for I could not bear to think it would be out of sight out of mind with you, as far as I am concerned."

"It could never be that," said Eila, half sadly and half playfully; "I shall have to keep my father confessor informed of all I do."

"Will you do so really?" he cried eagerly; "will you tell me everything that happens to you in your letters? They will be the only bit of happiness left to me after you are gone. Must I tell you my secret in so many words, or have you not guessed it long ago?"

"No!" she said in low tones, but whether in answer to his first or second question he could not have told.

"I may tell it you then, though I think you can hardly have helped finding it out for yourself long ago. Women always know when a man feels towards them in that way. You *must* know that I love you, and that I have loved you for a long time, from the day we met on Mount Wellington, you remember, and we came down in the snowstorm together."

He paused, as though waiting for some sign of acknowledgment on her part. A soft cloud, blown across the moon, and stained with delicate mother-of-pearl tints, had cast a deeper shade around them as he spoke. In the semi-dark-

ness he perceived that she was lifting the muslin-crowned hat to her head. It was as though his confession had warned her that it would be wise to bring their moonlight interview to an abrupt termination.

"Do say something, dear," he whispered humbly.

"What is the use?" she said half plaintively, slipping down from the trunk as he spoke, and standing by his side while she leaned against its projecting branches. "It is a pity you have said what you did. I am so sorry you said it."

"Sorry! Why?" he questioned eagerly. "Why should you be sorry, my dear? I love you so entirely and utterly—so through and through—you can't tell. I don't think you understand even now. I love you for yourself, Eila; don't you see what a difference that makes? I don't love you selfishly—as men are supposed to love—for my own gratification. I know you are out of my reach—as much out of it as the moon up there in the sky; but that does not alter the fact. I love you, and I shall go on loving you to the end of the chapter—for time and eternity, if there *is* an eternity. And what influence do I want my love to have upon your life? Tell me that. Do I ask you to do anything wrong, or what the world considers wrong? What return do I ask for a love that will last as long as life itself—that will keep me not only from marrying, but even from looking at another woman as long as you are in the world? I think you are shaking your head; I believe you are laughing—I could see your teeth shining just now in the moonlight. Well, laugh away; I know myself, and time will convince you, if nothing else does, that I am telling you the simple truth. What return, I say, do I ask for such a love as this? Why, only that you should have confidence in me always—*always*. Do you hear? Tell me all that concerns you, dear. If you are in trouble, I will do my utmost to help you. If you need money, I will send you my last penny. Supposing you should have an illness, or some accident that spoiled your beauty, you would always be the same to me. I want you to remember that. I go farther still; for I believe if you were to commit a crime, and all

the world were to throw stones at you, I should not be able to love you any the less. What can I say more?" He stopped; then hurriedly: "Yes, there is one thing more; and you will forgive me for saying it, because I love you. I cannot tell how you will manage to steer your course in life. You have no chart to go by, you know; and I see rocks ahead that you can't know anything about. Well, just remember this: Whatever should happen to you, don't be afraid to tell me, even if you should let someone else tell you what I have told you this evening—someone, we'll say, who takes a different way of telling it from me. If you should—which God forbid!—make shipwreck of your life, don't keep it from me. Don't even let shame itself stand in the way of your coming to me."

He stopped short again. Eila felt her cheeks burn in the cool night air. Something prompted her to extend her hand; he seized it, and held it like a vice in his nervous clasp. The pressure, as he wrung it unconsciously in the earnestness of his speech, almost made her cry out with the pain.

"Could you have cared for me a little, my darling?" he whispered. "But I have no right to ask you such a question. You must forgive me; I hardly know what I am saying. What I want to impress upon you is that nothing can ever change my feeling towards you. It seems a rash vow to make, doesn't it? But I make it fearlessly. I put myself in mind of the hero of a silly old melodramatic play I saw somewhere once. It was played by a German, I remember; he used to come rushing on to the stage at every critical moment with the word, 'Hee-re I am—stanch and true!' Well, remember here I am, and don't be afraid to come to me for help. I know you so well, dear—better than you can imagine; and I have a fatherly and brotherly feeling about you just as much as a loverly one. Will you think of this sometimes, if you feel tempted to do anything rash? Will you say to yourself, 'There's a poor old fellow out there who only lives for *me*, and it will break his heart if I do such and such a thing. I will write to him about it first; perhaps he will find a way to get me what I want.' Will you promise me this, Eila?"

All this time her right hand had lain close in his grasp. She left it there, and, placing of her own accord her other hand in his disengaged right, stood fronting him, both hands held firmly now within his own. Standing close to him thus, her figure bore the same proportion to his as that of the maid to her Huguenot lover in Millais's beautiful picture. Her eyes were bent; but she could feel that he was breathing quickly as he waited for her to speak.

"What would you have me say? What ought I to say?" she began at last, hesitating.

"Say exactly what you feel, my dear. Don't think of *ought*; only speak as you feel. *I love you.*"

"Then I will," she said, with sudden resolution; "I will speak right out for once. No 'shams,'" with a dreary little laugh, "as Carlyle calls them; only the truth from my heart. I like you to care about me as you do; it *will* be a help to me—more than you can imagine. And I care for you, too—you may believe that I do; but not as you care for me. It is not my fault. I think the power of loving in that way—the faculty of it altogether—has been somehow destroyed in me. I simply can't recall the love I had for my husband. If he were to come back to me cured to-morrow, I should shudder and run away. I have been through experiences you can never imagine. Sometimes I think they have made a monster of me; for I like to be loved, and I like people to be fond of me. Perhaps the position in which I am placed makes things so different—the knowing that I am not free to give myself to anyone I might care about. But what you have told me this evening will make a difference indeed. I shall place you apart now from everybody else in the world. I know you are afraid I am not quite to be trusted. Why do you have that feeling about me? Tell me."

"Did I say you were not to be trusted?" he said. "I did not mean you to think that. But you have a curious nature, Eila. It is full of depths for me who have studied it; and yet there is a lightness about it that would prevent my being astonished at almost anything that might happen to you. If it were not for that quality, you would not be forced to deplore your marriage to-day."

"But I was so much younger," she murmured; and then suddenly, with the gesture of a child who seeks to disarm the reproachful attitude of an over-fond parent, she raised her lips to his.

"Oh, my darling!" he said in low, passionate tones—"my darling!" For an instant's space he held her close pressed to his heart; then detaching himself with an effort, "Eila, my love!" he cried, "it is well you are going away." His voice trembled; he walked away from her in violent agitation, returning once more to her side with rapid footsteps. "We will go back at once," he said. "There, your hat has fallen off!" He picked it up in feverish haste, and set it on her head. "What is that saying about '*Qui vent faire l'ange?*' But never mind the rest. Take my arm, little girl, and hurry along."

He led her on swiftly in silence for the space of a few moments, until they were close to the gate of Cowa Cottage, visible in the moonlight as a white break to the indistinct outline of thick hedge that ran round the garden.

"Good-night, and good-bye," he said, and so vanished into the night.

Eila's cheeks were still burning as she walked slowly up the garden-path beneath the over-arching branches of apple and cherry trees to the veranda, whence the sound of the family voices, raised in argumentative parley, reached her through the darkness.

"How can I tell what I might feel if I were free!" she repeated to herself. "Does Reginald look upon what has happened this evening as a pledge of something more than friendship, I wonder? I hope not. How could I help wanting to show that I was moved by the offer of such devotion as his!"

As she slowly mounted the veranda steps, illumined by the light of a lamp standing upon an outer window-sill, a little girl flew towards her with outstretched arms.

"Your face is so warm—so warm!" said the child, drawing it down towards her own, with both arms clasped around her sister's neck. "Dick told us Mr. Acton would be with you; but you are all alone. What will mother say?"



I suppose you ran all the way back from Ivy Cottage when you found it was so dark ?”

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## CHAPTER V.

## A PECULIAR FAMILY.

FOR a family whose ways were peculiar, there could not have been found a more eminently suitable abode (and I say it without any punning intention) that the mountain fastness of Cowa, which was just such a natural stronghold as would have been converted, in the days of marauding barons and robber chiefs, into an impregnable citadel. Its inmates, however, were never driven, even in the earliest and most lawless times, to entrench themselves against such aristocratic aggressors as these. The only historic robbers that Tasmania annals can show are the now well-nigh extinct race of bush-rangers, who a few centuries earlier might possibly have laid the foundations of an antipodean aristocracy, but whose ultimate fate in our more prosaic age was most frequently to be caught and hanged. Had defensive measures, however, been necessary, Cowa would have afforded every facility for making them. The long veranda in front of the house might have served as a bastion, whence it would have been easy to fling stones at the enemy bold enough to climb the wearisome slope to the attack. Even in peaceful Hobart, and in the peaceful occupation of the Clare family, it served as a vantage-ground for purposes of social, if not of warlike, entrenchment. From the veranda a visitor might be descried, as Elijah descried Elisha, from a long way off, and hasty measures taken for planting behind a haystack, if he were not of the order whose coming was to be hailed. Similarly, steps might be taken to receive him becomingly, if the inmates decided upon being at home. The ordinary family habiliments were of a kind in which they objected—the girls at least—to being caught. Eila would roam about all day in her faded cotton gown, of

which the erstwhile hue was almost as difficult to discern as that of the draperies of those archaic polychrome Greek statues that have recently been unearthed upon the Acropolis, to the great joy of archæologists. She was rarely seen, it is true, without a magnificent rose, or bunch of roses, stuck in her waistband, dangling from her collar, or hairpinned behind her ear; but even South Sea belles will array themselves in flowers, and in all other respects their attire is, as we know, of the most elementary and casual description. Mamy affected blouses in season and out of season; they dated from the epoch when her dress had followed the same lines as her brother Dick's, and she would not abandon them now, neither would she forswear the boy's cricketing-belt that held them round her supple waist. It was in a garment of this description, frayed and strawberry-stained, that she had received and refused her first offer of marriage.

Truca, rendered defenceless by reason of her youth and inexperience, was fain to accept the heritage of the worn-out, washed-out frocks of mother and sisters. Cut short—much shorter than she liked—the coloured prints that had aired their pristine freshness on the persons of Mrs. Clare and her elder daughters might be seen whisking about the place round Truca's stockinged calves throughout all the seasons of the ensuing year. Truca's only thought in connection with her personal appearance, the one evidence of self-consciousness that she had inherited from Eve after the Fall, was shown in her sensitiveness upon the score of the plumpness of her nether extremities. She cared no more for the make of her dresses or the browning of her neck than a lily of the field or a gipsy; but a system of bantering applied to the calves would have appealed to her keenest sympathies. Her sisters and brothers made their girth and solidity the subject of much banter. They were known in the family as the champagne bottles, and the little girl never went out without being weighed down by the thought that the passers-by were laughing at them. Knowing that this was her tender point, the family showed the consideration usual in families by levelling pleasantries at them upon

all occasions, until the desire to be grown up and to "go into" long dresses took ardent possession of Truca's little soul. She had her metaphysical moods like the rest, and was still in the lisping stage when she asked piteously why God "thent little babies into the world when they couldn't tell if they wanted to come." She possessed a collection of small wooden dolls, with which she would play on rainy days after a fashion of her own. With their aid she would readjust the recent chapters of history she had learned, turning Lady Jane Grey into the Queen of England, in lieu of beheading her; while bloody Queen Mary was bound to a slate-pencil stuck upright on a collection of bits of red tinfoil stripped from the necks of old wine-bottles, and supposed to represent the stake and faggots, to which poetical justice, dealt out by Truca, would have condemned her. Her favourite diversion, however, was to make everybody repent and be good—even to the devil, represented by a black doll enveloped in scarlet flannel, like a fireman, with a black worsted tail. But this pastime was only indulged in on days of sleet and rain, for Truca, like the rest of the family, lived in the open air, and slept in it too, when the nights were unduly warm. Her favourite friend and companion after her elder sister, who taught her her lessons, was her little Jersey cow, between whom and herself there existed the perfect understanding that only mutual confidence can engender. What with the blouses, the faded cottons, and Dick's sandalled feet, the family at Cowa regarded an unexpected visitor very much as simple Galilee must have regarded the Assyrian who came down like a wolf on the fold, with his cohorts gleaming in purple and gold. Hence the veranda was invaluable as a post of observation. There was always time before the arrival of the enemy to make a hurried clearance of litter, to throw a becoming piece of crewel-work (that was the merest stage adjunct) upon the veranda-table, in lieu of the stocking in process of darning, or to substitute a school-prize of Longfellow's Poems for the heterodox book in course of reading. There was time for this and more, for it was a long pull and a strong pull up the hill; and even the least enthusiastic admirer of Nature

found frequent occasion to pause and gaze upon the view in the course of the ascent.

Another advantage in the position of the homestead was the facility it afforded for retrieving slips of memory. The family dwelt, as we have seen, very much in the clouds—metaphorically as well as actually—and it was no unusual thing for the person who was going into town for the express purpose of posting the letters to leave them lying upon the first chair to hand. When this was the case, a far-reaching “coo-ee” from the veranda would stop the emissary half-way to town, and Truca would skip down the hill in his wake, waving the letters on high, with the speed of a fugitive rabbit. Signals of recognition might also be held out to a person returning from town almost before a “coo-ee” could reach his ears, and questions as to whether the bag of penny tarts, to serve in lieu of pudding, had been purchased might be telegraphically conveyed; while signals of distress might be held out, should the answer prove to be in the negative. With such advantages as these to boast of, it is small wonder that Cowa was esteemed by its inmates, in spite of its inaccessibility, and perhaps by reason of it, as the most convenient place of residence in the world. There was only Eila who was occasionally heard to lament that their callers were so limited in number. It was in the summer-time alone that they made their appearance, when the men-of-war lay at anchor in the harbour, and the season of strawberries and strangers was in full swing. Then passing friends among the officers, or some chance acquaintance from a neighbouring colony, would make their way up the hill uninvited, and, with Eila for a guide (she knew every stone and landmark upon the surrounding heights), and the younger tribe for counter-guides (since every one had a different road, leading in a different direction, to uphold), the party would make expeditions to the mountain fastnesses in the neighbourhood of Cowa, carrying, the one a kettle to be boiled for tea-making purposes, the other an unlimited supply of matches for kindling the fire, to be built up of scattered brushwood. Such acquaintances as joined in these expeditions were welcome to all, for they came because they

liked to come ; and more than one carried away a pang of regret for the "might-have-been" after picnicking with Eila and her brothers and sisters upon the purple heights of Knocklofty.

But, well as the Clares loved their home, they loved the land beyond the seas that they had never seen even better. From their earliest infancy they had been imbued with the belief that Europe was the earthly type of that "better land" which the "eye of man hath not seen, nor his imagination conceived." Though the finality of their mother's judgment respecting all things in heaven and earth had become a little fallible to them since they had arrived at years of discretion, they gave eager credence to her pictures of life in the Old World. To shake the dust of Hobart off their feet, and see the strange, enchanted regions she had described to them, wherein, according to Reginald's ironical simile, was to be found, as in Plato's republic, the exemplar, or archetype, of everything they saw—as through a glass darkly—in Tasmania, was the one hope and desire of their lives. None but Eila, who had learned experience with her one year of house-keeping in Victoria, gave thought to their want of means. Whether they imagined that, like Whittington, they would pick up nuggets on the London pavements, or that they had a vague impression that they would inhale sustenance with the very air of European cities, it would be difficult to say. Mrs. Clare's enthusiasm had spread to her children almost as soon as they could speak. From the cradle upwards they had been taught to look upon the land of their birth—for which they had, nevertheless, the instinctive affection that childish associations engender—as a place of exile and duration vile. It would have been against Nature—against child-nature, at least—not to cherish a fondness for the wild hills, the great sloping paddocks, the haystacks, the apple-trees, the cows, the pigs, the dogs, the fowls, and the flowers, that had been familiar facts in their lives as far back as they could remember. But they set no conscious value upon these, supposing that they formed part of the normal conditions of life, in the same way as the air and the sunshine form part of it. When visitors from England admired the

magnificent view to be seen from the Cowa veranda, and expatiated upon the transparent air, and the clear-cut outline of the mountain range that bordered the sapphire waters of the harbour, the family would listen to such comments with wondering incredulity. Had not their mother told them there were no trees, no grass, no sylvan beauties here that could gladden a cultivated eye? What could people who had seen the ancestral parks of England find to admire in the wild gorges of Knocklofty? Their secret conviction was that people admired the view to please them, just as they declared that the Cowa strawberries of Willie's planting were the finest they had tasted. They believed that to have been born and brought up in the colonies was to have endured an exceptionally hard fate. But now, at last, the prospect of escaping from their southern Siberia seemed likely to be realized, and, as Eila had told Reginald, all their thoughts, all their dreams, all their talk, converged to the one topic of their journey.

The day after Eila's visit to Ivy Cottage the family gathered in the veranda, where Willie was waiting with hammer and nails in front of a large packing-case. Looking at them in a group, you would have seen at a glance why the epithet of "peculiar" was applied to them, for there was an indefinable suggestion of something foreign, exotic, and creole in the appearance of each and all.

Mrs. Clare looked, at a first glance, almost as young as her daughters. Like Lady Jane in the "Ingoldsby Legends," she was tall and slim, and possessed the kind of shoulders for which shawls must surely have been invented before Fashion had decreed that shoulders should be made to look high and square. Her hair was black and shiny, and lay smoothly against the sides of a classically-shaped head. It was only upon closer inspection that the sallow fixity of her complexion *accused*, as the French say, her maturer years. Her neck had lines that are not seen in the necks of younger women, showing that Time was already tightening his fingers around it. Father Time, as he is undeservedly called, is not unlike certain earthly fathers, who are only caressing to their offspring in early youth, and who press

heavily upon them as they advance to years of discretion. The longer we live, indeed, the harder he lays his hand upon us, until his rude touch effaces well-nigh all the graces he fashioned for us so lavishly at the outset. Mrs. Clare's face was agreeable to look upon, in spite of its sallowness. The eyes were bright and dark; yet there was something unreachably about them, and they could gaze at nothing with the obstinate intensity of expression of a visionary. The profile view of the features betrayed a certain flatness, suggestive of Japanese or Mongolian origin. The young Clares adored their mother, but from an early age there had been a tacit understanding among them that her moods were not to be depended upon, and that mother's way was like nobody else's way. Her opinions, as Dick had declared, represented an unknown quantity. It would almost have seemed as though each branch of her widely-diverging ancestors exercised a kind of supremacy over her in turn. There were days when she had the quick intelligence and the constitutional scepticism of her grandfather, the Chevalier; other days when the superstitious instincts transmitted by the Begum appeared to take the upper hand. Upon yet other occasions the fund of conscientious zeal she had inherited from the Unitarian minister, her father, would assert itself aggressively, and she would set every member of the household hard at work upon some entirely unprofitable task. In one respect she was like more ordinary mothers all the world over, in that she was entirely convinced of the swan-like nature of each and all of her goslings. Dick, however, was her favourite, for Dick and she saw the world through almost similar glasses. When these two walked out together, people would look after them in the streets, and the uncomprehending and uneducated would laugh. Dick's black hair hung in pot-hooks round his neck. No persuasions could induce him to have it cut; and his mother had a fancy for putting on a ribbon or an appendage that falsified all the rest of her attire. They rarely walked out together without going through a preliminary scene with Eila, in which, by dint of coaxing, scolding, and, if the truth must be told, of shedding one or two tears of genuine vexation, she persuaded

them to allow her to make them look respectable. Dick and his mother assimilated the newest doctrines and theories of the day, and applied them in ways, and carried them to lengths, that would have greatly astonished their originators.

Willie and Mamy were known as the fair ones of the family, the phrase being applied strictly to the hue of their skins, for Willie possessed but a modified share of his sister's good looks. He was shorter, sturdier, and more Saxon-looking than the rest. It was his constant endeavour to sit upon Dick, who though taller, and possessing more promise of moustache in the dark down upon his upper lip, was two years younger than himself. But Dick was self-assured with the supreme self-assurance of a "home-keeping" youth, and would not allow himself to be sat upon. He treated his elder brother with a kind of lofty condescension, against which neither words nor fists could prevail, and laid down the law to his mother and sisters in turn. His twin sister, Mamy, was his disciple and his ally. Between this pair there existed the curious community of sensation that is only to be found in twins. In their childish days to punish one was to punish both, and as they grew up, Mamy seemed to be half boy, and Dick to be half girl, when they were together. The family nose was the weak point, and was much the same in all. It was not a finely-turned feature, and was marred by a tendency to wide-spread nostrils. Dick's lips were also somewhat thick, but this defect was redeemed by the gleam of such teeth as only the dark-skinned races can show when he smiled.

Truca was an autumn bud. She had been the surprise baby of the band, and so far seemed destined to figure as the ugly duckling in respect of her outward appearance. The defective nose was exaggerated in her case into a snub, and her mouth was larger than was strictly becoming. There was a warm rustiness of hue observable in her hair, her eyes, and her complexion, which seemed to invest her with a kind of bronze aureole when she sat, like Queen Anne, in the sun. She had a highly-strung, impressionable nature, and would pause in her play at a very early age to run and be kissed by



mother or sisters, with a wistful expression in her eyes of Vandyck brown, that seemed to ask for reassurance against the thoughts reflected in them. The Phantom of Fear lurks behind every mystery, and what is the very consciousness of life itself but the most crushing of mysteries to the dawning intelligence of a child? Nevertheless, there were times when Truca enjoyed running hither and thither in the unconscious joy of being, as behoves children of her age; for, like Wordsworth's little maid, she "felt her life in every limb," and disported herself in the sunshine in obedience to the law of her nature as instinctively as a Shetland pony or a young kitten.

That there was a solemn function to be fulfilled in the veranda this afternoon was evident from the fact that the entire family was assembled there. The crude light of the afternoon sun illumined the group, irradiating the faces of the younger members and hardening that of their mother, for the sun is masculine and knows how to flatter youth, while he is sometimes unnecessarily severe upon those who have left it behind. The same light shone down upon the large packing-case, and upon an oil-painting that lay at the bottom of it; but here its effects were disastrous, for it converted the varnished surface into indiscriminate splotches of shininess. The portrait of the Chevalier had been solemnly taken down from its place of honour on the wall, and was about to be nailed down by Willie in presence of the Chevalier's descendants.

"Mind the face!" said Mrs. Clare fearfully. "Bring me some rags, Eila. We might lay them over it before the cover goes on."

"He'll come out like a mummy!" observed Dick, as the girls brought their contribution of calico-strips and laid them carefully over the painting. "No! I know: he's like a fakir, and we're going to bury him for three months, and then bring him to life again to work a miracle for us."

"It will be a miracle indeed, if he gets us the ruby," said Eila. She was kneeling by the case and gently wiping the picture before hiding it from view. "Eyes, look your last! What a curious thing!" she added: "even when he is lying

on his back his eyes seem to follow us about just as they did when he hung on the wall; but how strange and crusty the cheeks look when you are quite close to them! I wonder whether the painting can have any intrinsic value of its own."

"I wonder!" echoed Willie. "Say, mother, has the old man any market value, do you think?"

"Market value!" echoed Mrs. Clare indignantly; "what a way to speak of your great-grandfather, Willie! You are as bad as the young spendthrift in the play who wanted to sell his ancestors."

"Well, we're going to sell the Chevalier for what he'll fetch, aren't we?"

"Nothing of the kind," rejoined his mother; "we're not going to part with him out of the family. I have always looked upon that picture as a kind of pledge, a proof that we are the rightful heirs of the ruby your great-grandfather left to your grandmother—my very own mother. The portrait will pass into the hands of another branch of the family, but only for a time, I hope. Dick will buy it back for us before long."

Dick's only comment upon this remark was a self-confident smile. It was a generally accepted thing in the family that Dick's talent would enable him to become rich speedily. A few months under some master in London or Paris, just to get his hand in, and then he would do busts at the rate at which the greatest sculptors did them, and make a rapid fortune.

"I expect the picture has a value of its own, all the same," he said, in an assured voice.

"You may be sure it has," asserted Mrs. Clare. "Of course, there is nobody here who could appreciate it; but, I believe, any sum would be given for it at home. What was that you were telling me the other day, Willie, about seventy thousand pounds being paid for some old picture—nothing but a portrait, too? or was it seventeen? It was seven something, I know."

"It was seventy," said Willie—"seventy thousand pounds; but it was the work of an old master."

"Well, the Chevalier is getting to be an old master, isn't he, mother?" said Mamy, moved by a desire to conciliate her favourite brother. "Isn't it more than a hundred years old?"

"What! older than the oldest building in Tasmania?" said Eila? "How wonderful that would seem!"

"But not so old as the Tower we're going to see in England," chanted Truca—"the Tower and the block. Oh, I do feel so impatient; I want to be there now!"

"But what would we do if Mr. de Merle would have nothing to say to us when we get home?" put in Eila meditatively.

"No risk of that when we've made ourselves known to him," said Mrs. Clare confidently; "my only fear is that he will want to adopt all of you children at once, and I would rather we kept our independence. Now, Willie, you may close up the case; the picture is protected enough, I think."

There was a moment of silence as the boys adjusted the cover and Willie hammered in the first nail. It was really as Dick had said, as though they were nailing up the Chevalier in his coffin. He had been a living presence among them for as long as they could remember. From the time that they had been aware of knowing right from wrong, his face had always seemed to wear a stern or a smiling expression, following the verdict uttered by their separate consciences. He was a link, too, with that strange, impalpable past whose existence it was so hard to realize in Tasmania. Of their ancestors on their father's side they had no knowledge, and very little curiosity. Mrs. Clare's individuality had so effectually impressed itself upon her children, that they constituted what might be called a one-sided progeny. She had kept for herself the part of the queen bee in the domestic hive, and though Mr. Clare had been no drone, and had worked with patient self-effacement to secure his family from want, he had been constrained to play what is commonly called "second fiddle" to his spouse. His quiet, kindly, matter-of-fact presence had been missed and mourned for, but not passionately yearned after. The children had never felt about their father as they felt about their mother,

that life would not be possible without him. They had never cared to hear about the humdrum records of his early life at the Custom House in Tasmania. They were secretly a little ashamed of their connection with his brother, their uncle, who was nothing but a homely country store-keeper living near Oatlands. Willie had been wont to spend his holidays with this relative in his school-days, and would have liked to hold forth upon the incidents of his stay on his return, to boast of the opossums he had shot, and the fences he had jumped, and the bush-buggy he had driven round with half-chests of tea and boxes of soap and candles to be left at the houses of the customers. But his mother's face had checked the flow of his narrative. It made him think, he could not tell why, of the Chevalier's queue and sword.

Uncle William, for his part, rarely came to see them. He had come to town for his brother's funeral, and would have taken Willie back with him, and made him succeed to the business, had he been allowed. But Mrs. Clare's reception of the proposal had too plainly shown him that it was a mistake to have proffered it. Uncle William went away sooner than he had intended, and thenceforth the family heard but little of him. He was a childless widower, and was not supposed to be more than just "comfortable." Mrs. Clare spoke of his calling with disdain. The children had inferred early, from their mother's manner, that it was a very second-rate profession; and though they had nothing against their Uncle William, who was, if possible, quieter and more taciturn than their father, and who seemed kindly disposed towards them, they saw him depart to his country store without regret.

"Well, that's done," said Willie, in tones of triumph, as he hammered the last nail in with a vigorous hand; "I wonder when and where we shall open the case again?"

"It's almost a pity we didn't have a photograph taken of the Chevalier," said Eila; "for if anything happens to him on the way, all our journey would be for nothing."

"Do you call it nothing to see Europe?" said Mamy reproachfully.

"We can't see much without money," said her sister, in despondent tones. "None of you seem to consider that we shall have barely enough to live upon at home."

"If England is anything like what I remember it," said Mrs. Clare hopefully, "a penny there would go as far as a shilling out here. Dear me! when I remember the quantities of things one could get for a shilling! There seemed to be no end to them. And railway travelling, too. How cheap it was!"

"I wonder anyone lives here at all," said Mamy; "and such rich people, too."

"They would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven, I suppose," said Dick. "I say, I think I see a carriage coming up the hill. If it's any of your fine visitors, Eila, I'll clear out;" and he whistled to a large retriever that lay tapping its tail in idle content on the veranda boards, and walked away.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WARDENS.

THE carriage to which Dick had called his sister's attention, and which might be described toiling up the hill, was recognised as that of the Wardens. It had the effect of scattering the family in all directions.

Mamy ran away, and took refuge in the cottage of an old pensioner of the family called Mrs. Hunter. She had two motives for hiding—one that there were holes in the elbow of her blouse; the other that Sidney Warden, who had taken it into his head to ask her to marry him, might repeat his offer, and worldly-minded Eila would be vexed with her if she said "No" a second time.

Eila meanwhile ran hither and thither, putting things into place, and carrying on her own toilette operations in an ambulant fashion at the same time. She had already seen that Mrs. Warden was accompanied by her son and daughter. The former had developed into the thickset,

sturdy-looking youth foreshadowed in the boy. There was a suggestion of latent resistance in his whole personality—even to his hair, which was hopelessly straight and harsh. It stuck out like a brush, and refused to lie smooth. The Clares had long ago decided that Sydney was exactly like his hair, though they were fond of him in their own way. As for Eila, the thought that this heir of thousands of acres was perverse little Mamy's wooer set a halo round his stubbly locks they had never worn before. She ran down the veranda steps to welcome the trio as they arrived, and usher them to seats on the veranda. In Lucy, who was two or three years older than herself, she had a friend who belonged to the girlish period of her life. While she herself had been tossed about in the worst of life's storms, Lucy had remained moored in the quiet home haven. She was a refined edition of her brother in her outward appearance and demeanour, taller and better formed than he. Her mouse-coloured hair, guiltless of a fringe, was turned smoothly back from her delicate temples, surmounted by a gray straw hat wreathed with crimson roses. The rustle of her skirt, over which some soft gray material, warmed by a skilful intermingling of Oriental stripes, hung in such folds as only a Paris dressmaker might be supposed capable of arranging, sounded imposingly as she walked along. Though not five-and-twenty, she had none of the irresistible attractiveness of youth. One could almost imagine that she had looked as a child, and that she might yet look as an old woman, much as she did now; that she must keep through life the same unyouthfulness of complexion, the same neatly-turned nose and mouth, the same clear gray eyes and pencilled brows (these brows were Lucy's one beauty), the same unchanging serenity of expression. Loyal and honest that expression denoted her to be. There are faces which, for all their sweetness and softness, do not inspire us with absolute confidence. We have the feeling that perhaps if their owners were subjected to the test proposed by the whimsical old gentleman to the lady who refused a delicacy handed to her in public, "But if you were alone with it, madam?" we should not be entirely reassured as to the re-

sult. No such misgiving occurred to those who studied Lucy Warden's face. Her straightforward eyes, that were not without a hint of hardness in their direct glance, might have merited the epithet "true as steel." Eila admired Lucy; but she was conscious, though she could not always have told why, of not being entirely at ease in her presence. There was something in the expression of Lucy's eyes that rendered her vaguely uncomfortable at times. She had a secret notion that if her conduct should fall short of Lucy's standard, the latter would not make sufficient allowances for her. Reginald would do so, and he was quite as honourable in his way as Lucy. But that is the difference between being judged by a man and a woman, thought Eila—the one takes account of the person and the circumstances as well as the action; the other just approves or condemns the action by itself. "I am glad that women don't sit on the bench, after all," she added mentally, "though, of course, I uphold their being doctors and lawyers upon principle."

The ostensible reason of Mrs. Warden's visit was to find out from her dear young friends whether there was any truth in the report that they were going home. The real reason was that, at a dinner at Government House the preceding evening, she had heard a Sydney judge and his wife speak with enthusiasm of the picturesque aspect of the Cowa veranda, and refer to young Mrs. Frost as a really charming person. This reminded her that she had owed a call to the mother of the charming person ever since the preceding autumn. She had no compunction about taking Sydney with her. From the time that he had been a small and sulky-looking school-boy, he had been given the liberty of the Cowa demesne, where he felt himself, indeed, far more at home than in the fashionable atmosphere in which he had been nurtured. His mother took it for granted that he was the friend of the Clare boys rather than the girls. Even when he had reached his twentieth year, no suspicion of the real cause of his affection for Cowa crossed her mind.

After all, the otherwise most dangerous attraction to be found there was married and harmless, and the rest of the inmates were all children together. Even had Mrs. Warden

suspected her son of expending his calf-love upon young Mrs. Frost, the thought would not have been displeasing to her. She was what is called a moral woman, and a strict church-goer; but she had a naïve belief that the only end for which other people existed was to be useful to her and hers. It might be as well that Sydney should have a safety-valve of some kind pending the time when it would be incumbent upon his mother to find some nice, rich, well-connected, pious, and otherwise eligible young woman for his wife. In the meantime, it was only natural that he should like to keep up his intimacy with friends of his own age with whom he had been on rough-and-tumble terms almost as long as he could remember.

"It is really true, then, that you are going home?" asked Mrs. Warden, after she had disposed herself ceremoniously on the chair in the veranda that Truca had dragged from one of the bedrooms when the carriage was seen approaching. "So nice, to be sure! I quite long to be going, too. I suppose we shall have to make up our minds to it one of these days. It is quite the thing to take one's girls home to be presented now. But Lucy doesn't seem to care about it—do you, Lucy?"

"I? not at all!" said the young lady addressed, in a quiet, decided tone that matched with her expression.

She had been fixing Eila with her steadfast eyes, not with any air of vulgar curiosity, but with a kind of scrutinizing, interested gaze that seemed to have some definite object in view. Eila was glad when this intent glance was diverted from her.

"Mamy and I are not likely to have the chance of refusing to go to Court," she said, laughing—she was not, however, entirely at her ease, for Lucy's look and Mrs. Warden's four guinea bonnet combined had a somewhat paralyzing effect—"for that is the last thing that is likely to befall us."

"Oh, but you will be in time for the London season!" said Mrs. Warden, with half-implied reproach in her tones. "I was reading the list of the presentations in the *Lady* of last year, and there was a special mention of the Australian contingent of belles."



Eila smiled again, a little sadly this time.

"We shan't be able to afford much gaiety, I think," she said. "We are going in a sailing vessel, too; so it may be any time before we arrive. And, really, the great reason of our going is to get proper lessons for Mamy and Dick. Mother thinks Mamy's voice is worth cultivating, and Dick wants to carry on his art studies in Europe in earnest."

"His art studies!" echoed Mrs. Warden, with feigned interest; "you don't say so! We have friends who went to Paris last year to take lessons in painting, too. Fancy going to Paris for nothing but that! The Miss Flyte-Smythes. Lucy had a letter from the eldest the other day. It seems they copy from living models undressed—undraped, I think they call it. It sounds quite shocking, you know. Still, it seems to be the thing at home, and Mr. and Mrs. Flyte-Smythe are most particular people—very highly connected, too, in London, I am told; so I suppose there is nothing to say."

"Have they exhibited, do you know?" said Eila, feeling something was expected of her.

The ethics of art was a subject that she did not see her way to discussing with Mrs. Warden and her son and daughter, though it was just the kind that the family debating society would have loved to handle.

"I believe they have, and they work as hard as though they had to make their living by it; that is the most extraordinary part of it."

Mrs. Warden sighed, as though in regret at the aberration of her friends, and Sydney broke in with a husky-voiced inquiry respecting the whereabouts of the others.

"I'm not sure that my mother and Dick are at home," said Eila—she had reasons for believing that they had shut themselves up in one of the back-rooms; "but Mamy should be somewhere about; she ran over to old Mrs. Hunter's a few minutes ago."

Sydney involuntarily turned his head in the direction of the cottage, and Lucy said in her staid voice:

"Old Mrs. Hunter is your sister's protégée, isn't she? Doesn't she go and read to her sometimes?"

"Not often," said Eila. A transient gleam of mirth, promptly repressed, flashed from her soft dark eyes. "I am afraid she thinks it is better fun to hear her talk. We did try the plan of reading her a story once, but she was so disgusted when she heard it was all a make-up we never tried it again. She said if that was all people got their letters for they'd better leave it alone. There were lies enough in the world without looking for 'em in a book."

Lucy laughed.

"She is quite a character, isn't she? What will she do when you are all gone away, I wonder? By-the-by, what vessel are you going in?"

"The *Queen of the South*;" and Eila nodded with an air of proprietorship towards the barque lying a little way down the wharf in the far distance, with bare masts reflected in the glassy harbour.

"The *Queen of the South*!" echoed Lucy in dismayed tones; "that *will* be making a long journey of it. I suppose it will take twice as long as going by the mail?"

"Three times, I dare say," said Eila complacently; "but what does that matter when one has plenty of time to lose? You see, the passage does not cost half so much as by the mail, and then we shall be well found all the time, as the first mate was careful to remind us when we were looking over the vessel the other day."

Lucy said nothing; she was a little puzzled by Eila's manner, and rather inclined to wonder at the ambition that could prompt her friends to desire to see the world when it could only be accomplished under such uncomfortable conditions as these. Sydney was fidgeting about, obviously anxious to be on the move. His secret gratitude to Eila was unbounded when she said suddenly:

"I wish you would call Mamy from old Mrs. Hunter's, if you don't mind the trouble, Sydney. She would be sorry to miss seeing Lucy and wishing her good-bye."

Sydney started up with alacrity, knocking down a flower-stand in his haste. Before he had picked it up Lucy was on her feet as well.

"I want to go too," she said. "I have been neglecting

old Mrs. Hunter dreadfully lately. Come along, Eila, and leave mamma to admire the view by herself."

Eila protested, but Mrs. Warden added her persuasions to her daughter's. There was nothing in the world she would prefer, she declared, to a quiet rest in this most charming spot, while the young people went upon their errand of charity. She even pretended to drive Eila playfully away with her thickly-embroidered gold and mauve parasol. After this there was nothing for it but to yield, and the trio set off, Eila walking hatless between the brother and sister on their way to the old woman's cottage.

Mrs. Hunter's abode was situated in a spot that a monarch, or, rather, an artist, might have coveted for his inhabiting. Across the rugged descending slopes and the intervening clusters of buildings the winding waters of the Derwent lay broad and sparkling like a sapphire shield under the afternoon sun. Seen from this height, the river looked like a broad-bosomed lake, set round with royal mountains. To the right lay the gentle slopes of Mount Nelson, whose long descending sides were broken in places by some high-perched homestead, some patch of green civilization in the midst of the darker vegetation around. To the left Mount Direction reared its craggy steep skyward, and billowy hills, clothed with sombre scrub, rolled away to the horizon; while almost behind the cottage, though plainly visible from it, the frowning mass of mighty Mount Wellington loomed dark and distinct against the shining sky. With a sanatorium of Nature's own making to live in, and the liberal dole that she received from public and private sources to subsist upon, old Mrs. Hunter's latter end was better than her first. Eila hurried on, ostensibly to prepare her for the visit, though in reality to see that Mamy did not attempt to make her escape by the back-door. The dwelling consisted of a single room, which was scrupulously clean. Mrs. Hunter, it was well known, was what another euphonious colonial term calls an "old hand," and she maintained the orderly habits she had acquired at the expense of the State. The narrow bed in the corner was covered by a clean patch-

work quilt. There was even an attempt at decoration in the arrangement of some large shells that flanked the tin basin and bit of cracked looking-glass on the shelf. There were woodcuts from old periodicals pinned against the wall. As Eila approached the cottage, she heard the cracked voice of the old woman recounting in tremulous tones the exploits and shortcomings of her fowls.

"An' Mrs. Morris, if you'll believe me, dear, 'as been an' het 'er own heggs; an' if your ma 'll buy 'er hoff me, she shall 'ave 'er cheap; an'—— Oh, mercy, Lard, me back!"

The sudden ejaculation and the contortion that accompanied it were caused by the unexpected appearance of Eila's black merino skirt at the open door.

"It's only me," said the owner of the skirt, laughing and holding out her firm smooth hand, which the old woman seized in her skinny brown claw and mumbled at effusively, "so don't throw away your effect, Mrs. Hunter; keep it for Miss Warden, who will be here in another minute."

"The Wardens are not coming here!" exclaimed Mamy in dismay. "Give me the back-door key, Mrs. Hunter, quick!"

"No, don't, Mrs. Hunter; she's not to have it!" cried her sister, seizing her by the waist, while Mamy struggled to escape.

Finding her efforts in vain, she broke from her captor with a sudden quick movement, and with the words, "Then they shall see me as I am, and I don't care," flung forward to the encounter of the enemy.

"As I am" did not signify that Mamy was in the habit of resorting to artifices when called upon to appear before visitors. It meant simply that she had on a pair of kangaroo leather boots past redemption, that her blouse was fruit-stained, and her hair what girls call *anyhow*. In this attire she ran defiantly down the hill towards Lucy Warden and her brother, who were following upon Eila's footsteps. To walk down a declivity of any kind would never have entered the head of any member of the Clare family, who were accustomed to run "full tilt" down the rubbly descending path, steep and uneven as the bed of a mountain torrent,

that led to the road below, with feet that seemed to fly, as though they had been winged like Mercury's.

A certain eagerness was apparent in Sydney's manner as this tumbled apparition came rushing forward, but Mamy included him in a general "How d'ye do?" addressed to his sister and himself, and avoided looking at him as she turned back to walk towards Mrs. Hunter's cottage between the two.

"We needn't hurry," she said. "Mrs. Hunter wants you to surprise her in her best cap, Miss Warden."

"How is the poor old lady to-day?" asked Lucy; then, with an air of gentle patronage, "You were sitting with her, dear, were you not? It is very good of you."

It was observable that she called Mamy "dear," whereas the latter addressed her friend by the ceremonious title of "Miss Warden." Seven or eight years of difference in age, and such a difference in worldly advantages as may be measured by the influence of an income of a few hundreds and an income of several thousands on their daily lives, seemed to have created an impalpable barrier between them. Lucy, it is true, would have destroyed it, had she been allowed. She never saw Mamy—though she saw her but rarely—without saying, "I wish you would call me plain Lucy"; but the younger girl had never felt prompted to follow her bidding. The Wardens lived much in Melbourne, as well as at their country estate—a real manorial demesne, no mere bush home—in Tasmania; and when they occupied their house in Hobart, they did so after the fashion of rich people with liveried servants to do their bidding, and horses and carriages that drove them pompously through the quiet Hobart streets. Sydney Warden had been an intermittent visitor at Cowa for years past. The Clares, with the exception of Eila, dissociated him in their minds from his own people, and had come to look upon him almost as one of themselves from the first afternoon several years ago, when Willie had brought him to Cowa on a Saturday half-holiday. Mamy had been a turbulent little girl in those days, and Sydney's early and unromantic recollection of her was in the act of hurling a raw potato at him in defence of

her brother Dick, who was getting the worst of it in a struggle with him. How he continued to come every holiday until after a lapse of nearly eighteen months, which he had spent in Victoria, he returned to find his little potato-thrower grown into a bewitching young girl, need not be told here. He was certain now that he must have been in love with Mamy from the beginning, and that he had been only waiting until she could understand him to tell her so. His feeling had been so strong that he never dreamed it could be unshared; and the blow that had been inflicted when Mamy declared that she could not and would not marry him had been such that even now he was inclined to doubt the reality of her words. He had eagerly accepted his sister's proposal to call at Cowa the day after his repulse, about which he had said nothing to his family, as, indeed, he had said nothing regarding the nature of his sentiment for Mamy. Perhaps he had a secret misgiving as to the manner in which his announcement would be received. Perhaps he felt it would be wise to make sure of Mamy's consent in the first instance. Moreover, it is such an accepted thing among colonial youths, be they rich as Croesus or poor as Diogenes, that they have only their own inclination to consult in the choice of a wife, that to invite a preliminary discussion on the subject in the family circle would have seemed to Sydney a superfluous, not to say an indelicate, proceeding.

He could not refrain, however, from casting an appealing glance at the object of his passion, as he entered the cottage by her side in Lucy's wake. But Mamy resolutely ignored it. Her attention was taken up by watching the comedy of Mrs. Hunter's reception of her grand visitors. The old woman's expression as she received the tract and the half-pound of tea that Lucy silently deposited on the table by her side was a thing to be treasured up. The feigned deprecation and the covert mockery betrayed in the twinkle of the monkey-like eyes formed a combination as comic as it was diabolic.

Lucy, for her part, would never have dreamed of interpreting an expression in this light. When she was in Hobart she did not fail to take her due share of parish work,

and to fulfil the same zealously and conscientiously. To analyze the particular point of view whence her recipients regarded her bounty did not come within her province. Old Mrs. Hunter had no more individuality for Lucy than any other old woman in the parish to whom it was fitting to present tracts and tea. She was naïvely and sincerely convinced that she was the best judge of what was suited to the spiritual as well as to the corporeal needs of those she benefited. She applied it accordingly, a little austere, perhaps, as she was wont to perform all her other duties in that state of life into which, as she would have said herself, it had pleased God to call her.

When the tea and the tract had been bobbingly acknowledged, Lucy proceeded to make inquiries after old Mrs. Hunter's health. Though the words were kind and the glance that accompanied them well-meaning and benevolent, there was an unconscious stiffening in Miss Warden's entire person as she entered into conversation with the old reprobate that seemed to give quite a different signification to her utterance from that of any member of the Clare family. The difference was subtle; it was of a kind to be felt rather than described. Yet it seemed to invest the visit with a formality it had not worn before, and made Eila feel vaguely uncomfortable on old Mrs. Hunter's behalf. She tried to create a diversion by drawing out the latter upon the ever-fertile subject of the delinquencies of her fowls, and even Lucy was obliged to laugh when she heard of the damage wrought by Master 'Enery's beak upon Miss Hemily's tail. The party stood awkwardly silent for a moment, until Eila said in cordial society accents:

"Now we will leave Mrs. Hunter to discipline her fowls, and go back to tea at Cowa. I'm afraid your mamma has had no one but Truca to entertain her all this time."

"I'm sure Truca's quite equal to the task," said Lucy, with conventional politeness; "but if you must go now, I think I will stop behind a little if you don't mind. You see, it is a long time since I last read to Mrs. Hunter, and she can't complain that what *I* read to her isn't true, at any rate."

Perhaps there was the faintest hint of an implied rebuke in Lucy's tones as she said these words, glancing down meanwhile at a little volume she had drawn from her pocket while speaking. Eila perceived that it was a daintily-bound Testament, with a gilt cross stamped on the black cover. She knew that Lucy had strong High Church sympathies, and looked doubtfully across at old Mrs. Hunter, who was standing with an air of exaggerated and devoutly expectant humility that boded no good result from the reading to which Lucy was about to subject her.

"I wish you would come, all the same, Lucy," urged Eila weakly; "you might go back to Mrs. Hunter afterwards, you know."

"Afterwards!" echoed Lucy. "Why, it's late already; there wouldn't be time, indeed." The small sacrifice of the tea, which she felt to be a sacrifice nevertheless, was an additional inducement to remain. The others prepared to go, and Lucy followed them, to say demurely at the door, "You will tell mamma I will join her at the bottom of the hill, please," when another shadow darkened the entrance, and her voice suddenly faltered and stopped.

I think she had divined whose figure this shadow represented even before she lifted her eyes towards it. The figure was tall, square, and manly; the eyes were blue, and also had a manly, trust-inspiring expression, though just now there was a hint of something anxious and expectant in them, too. That Lucy Warden had divined that this unexpected presence was that of Reginald Acton would not have been doubted by any one who had known the secret of Lucy's heart. Did she not, indeed, carry the influence of this very presence in her waking thoughts and her nightly dreams, when she would fain have been fixing them upon things above? and of what other earthly presence could the same have been said? It is true that she had never exchanged long conversations with Reginald at any time; and yet she believed, and perhaps she was not very far out in her belief, that she knew him as he really was. It is a fact that when people are entirely themselves—that is to say, when they are simple and natural in all the relations of life, a



thing which is falsely supposed to be only possible when there is nothing to hide—we may be supposed to know them, as far as one human being can know another from the first moment of their meeting. Lucy thought that Reginald liked talking to her. His eyes were so kind and his manner so cordial and interested; and Heaven, or Lucy herself, only knew how much she liked talking to him! Maidenly reticence seemed to Lucy at this time one of the saddest attributes that it is incumbent upon self-respecting young women to possess. For all she knew to the contrary, Reginald was heart-free. There was no reason against his making her his wife if he had known what a lifelong, heart-felt, body-and-soul devotion she was prepared to bestow upon him. But how was he to divine her sentiment, and, failing his divination of it, who was to inform him of it? Reginald was poor. Lucy was looked upon as an heiress. She was well aware that there were men who would marry her for her money to-morrow, but Reginald was not of this kind. Her fortune, that constituted such a powerful attraction in the eyes of others, was, as she believed, an obstacle in his. It would preclude, perhaps, the very first idea of paying his addresses to her from his mind. And there was no one whom she could take into her confidence. Her mother least of all, for Lucy well knew that it was Mrs. Warden's ambition that she should marry "an English title." The rest mattered little. Only the title was a *sine quâ non*. There had been times when Lucy had entertained wild ideas of sending Reginald an anonymous letter—ideas that were discarded as soon as they arose with a blush of burning shame, for her sense told her that the real author of such an epistle would be instantly divined. It seemed so hard that the thing which was called "filthy lucre" should create a barrier between herself and him. When she saw him unexpectedly, as to-day, not having met him for what seemed like a very long time, a nervous tremor passed over her usually impassive face. She was too taken up with her own emotions to notice that Eila was almost as agitated as herself. To tell the truth, the scene of the preceding evening was still very vivid in young Mrs. Frost's memory. If Lucy

had known! Nay, if any one had known! If those present could have imagined that not twenty-four hours ago Reginald's arms had held her encircled in their passionate embrace! What would they have said? What would they have thought? How would they have looked at her then?

It was Reginald, however, who set all the company at ease now. Eila could not but admire his serenely usual manner. One swift glance of intense feeling, of brother-like, lover-like solicitude and reassurance, directed for one instant at her troubled countenance, and then he was addressing the party collectively in the pleasant, deliberate male voice that matched so well with his face.

"What is the palaver about, Mrs. Hunter?" he asked, turning to the old woman with his hand extended, after he had shaken hands with the rest. "Were you telling Miss Warden that Mrs. Morris had the pip?"

"The Lard forbid, sir!" ejaculated Mrs. Hunter piously, "though she ain't long for this world, anyhow! I was tellin' the company 'ere assembled as 'ow she'd been an' het 'er own hegg, and into the pot she goes if I don't find a charitable lady as 'll buy 'er hoff me 'fore the end o' the week."

She looked with a meaning blink of the monkey orbs towards Lucy, but Lucy's lips were severely closed, and Eila said laughingly:

"Mrs. Hunter won't keep any fowls whose morals are at all questionable—will you, Mrs. Hunter?"

"Ah, them fowls knows when they're breakin' the laws, same as if they was Christians," declared the old woman, bustling about to find seats for the party.

Old Mrs. Hunter possessed the *savoir vivre* that belongs to a wicked past. Some people might have appeared at a disadvantage under the contingency of providing seats for five visitors where, strictly speaking, there was only accommodation for two. Not so this ancient inmate of Hobart Gaol. She waved Reginald to a seat on the edge of her patchwork-covered bed in the corner, and Sydney to another on a reversed wash-tub, while she offered the two wooden chairs to the young ladies as though she had been a Du Maurier duchess receiving her latest lions at an afternoon

crush. Mamy was already sitting upon the table, and was therefore provided for. There was a little friendly talk, during which Lucy's Testament was somewhat slipped back into her pocket, seeing which Eila said persuasively :

"Do let me induce you to come back with us, Lucy, for we really must go now. Truca will be in despair if we let the tea get cold. She has had all the responsibility of getting it ready for us."

"I don't deserve any tea," said Miss Warden hesitatingly ; in her heart she felt that the temptation to return now Reginald was of the party was too powerful to be resisted. "I said I wouldn't have any a minute ago."

"Never mind ; you can retract. I won't behave like Mrs. Fry," said Eila, laughing.

"What did Mrs. Fry do ?" asked Reginald, looking at her with eyes whence he essayed to withhold the love-light that illumined them.

"What she did ?" Eila spoke hurriedly ; it was evident that she was nervous. "Oh, it is just a silly little story I read in a goody-goody book once. Mrs. Fry asked a little girl to have a piece of cake, and the little girl refused. I suppose she was shy, poor little thing. But next time she was asked she had grown braver, so she said, 'Yes, please.' 'Nay, then, thee shalt not have it now,' Mrs. Fry said, 'for thou hast told a lie in the first instance.' Wasn't she a horrid old thing ?"

"I should have told her she was telling a lie too," said Reginald quietly, "if she had offered me the cake without meaning me to have it."

Lucy listened to this conversation with a grave expression of countenance. If it had been anyone but Reginald, she was not sure that she would have approved of the comment made on the story of Mrs. Fry. And now the party trooped to the wide-open door with repeated good-byes to Mrs. Hunter.

Innumerable were the wrinkles in the old woman's mummified face as she responded to their farewell greeting, with an occasional well-contrived contortion of her whole body as a reminder of the existence of her rheumatics. More

monkey-like than ever the closing of her dried-up and shrivelled brown fingers upon the separate shillings that Reginald and Sydney dropped into her parchment palm at parting.

"Ah, me dears!" she cried, in forlorn, worn-out trembling tones, loud enough, however, for them to hear her as they went trooping away, "I wish ye all long life and 'appiness, an' rich 'usbands an' wives; and ye won't 'ave far to look for 'em neither, I'm thinkin'; you mark an old woman's words."

It was a short downward walk or run to Cowa, but short as it was, Sydney contrived to make Mamy loiter behind with him for a short space. The absence of all beard and moustache might have further accentuated his unmistakably boyish aspect, had it not been for a certain air of dogged resolve which gave premature maturity to his face. A person seeing the torso only would have concluded that it belonged to a tall man. The shortness, however, of Sydney's legs laid him open to the uncomplimentary charge of stumpiness.

He had the same honest eyes as Lucy's, but just now they wore a somewhat bewildered air. Mamy walked, not too willingly, by his side. With her bare head, over which the tumbled shiny hair lay guiltless of parting, like a boy's, and her collarless, fruit-stained blouse, she was in anything but courting trim. The incongruity of her attire disconcerted her. It is a well-known fact that our moods are largely influenced by the clothes we wear. Mamy felt that it would have been easier to repulse Sydney with dignity had she been dressed in a silk gown, with a train like Lucy's.

"Did you tell your sister about what I asked you yesterday?" inquired Sydney at last, in dejected tones.

"Yes," said Mamy shortly.

"And what did she say?"

"Said I was a fool," was the prompt reply.

"Did she? Oh, Mamy, does that mean you might come round after all?" he cried, for the admission seemed to imply that Mamy had possibly reconsidered her decision. "You know I wouldn't mind waiting any time."

"What's the use of waiting?" put in Mamy disconsolately. "I know quite well I shall never change."

"But how can you tell?" he urged. "You don't hate me so much, do you, Mamy?"

"Hate you? Don't be so silly? You know quite well I like you tremendously."

"Then, if that's so, why couldn't you like me just a little more?" Sydney's ordinary unmodulated, matter-of-fact voice was trembling now with eagerness. "I'm not asking you to be in love with me if you can't feel like it. Only let me be your husband, and I'll take my chance of the rest."

"Let you be my husband?" repeated Mamy slowly, with a curious look in her childish eyes. "Do you know, Sydney, I really think I'm older than you in some ways, after all. Can't you understand that it is just because I like you, and don't love you, that it would be impossible—altogether impossible—to marry you! Why, I could not do you such a wrong."

"How could it be a wrong," urged Sydney moodily, "when I'm willing to take the chance? I told you yesterday I was ready to run the risk, and I'll stick to what I said. Look here, Mamy, don't bother your head about liking me a lot or liking me a little. Just give me what you can, and let me make the best of it. I can't settle to anything as long as you keep trying to choke me off as you do. People might think I was young to know my own mind, but I'm over twenty-one—going on for twenty-two—and I've made up my mind longer than you think; I've always had you in my thoughts one way and another. You were a little kid, Mamy, the first time I saw you. You remember that day you shied the potato at my head, only I dodged it. Well, I've always felt the same about you ever since that day. I've always admired you, I can't say how much. You've got no nonsense about you like other girls. Besides—I don't know what's the reason—I only know I can't care for other girls. I can't care for anybody but you."

"Well, what can I do?" cried Mamy desperately; "it isn't my fault!"

"I don't say it is," replied Sydney humbly; "but you

might have a little pity for a fellow, anyhow. I can never feel any other way; I'm sure of that. Look here; I came up to-day on purpose to ask you something, Mammy. if I got the chance. I'm not going to worry you, I promise you. I don't want you to bind yourself. Besides, I know you wouldn't, so it would be no use asking you; but if I choose to be bound myself, you can't stop me—can you? Now, I'm going to bind myself to you for five years, whatever happens. I'm going to swear it to you, so help me, God! and may I be burned up in hell if I don't keep my word!"

"Stop, you wicked boy!" cried Mammy, round-eyed with horror, and putting a finger into each ear. "I won't listen to another word."

"Burned up in hell!" repeated Sydney with gusto, pulling her hands with gentle force from her head; they had been upon brotherly and sisterly terms almost as long as she could remember. "I bind myself for five years, and I shall wait to see if you won't give me a hearing at the end of them. I shall consider myself engaged just the same as if you had said 'Yes,' you know."

"And what if I were to go and get married?" said Mammy defiantly.

"Well, it would be off then. But you won't?" he pleaded. "You might say you would be bound for a year, at least."

"What! for a year only? With pleasure," replied Mammy, in mock society accents.

"Well, give me your hand upon it here behind the haystack," he cried eagerly, as they passed through the paddock towards the side-entrance to the homestead. "No, give me a kiss upon it, Mammy; you never kiss me now, darling."

"What's the use?"

She extended her cheek to him; but, breaking away the second after, she ran at all her speed away from him to the house. She was full of elation at the satisfactory hiatus in her courtship. The compromise proposed by Sydney was all to her advantage. Eila would not scold or lecture her any more now; for Sydney was still to be had for the asking, and she herself was free as the air of heaven. Then

five years, as everybody knows, are an immense lapse of time. What might not happen in five years? There was space for all the family to die, or for Sydney to change a hundred times over. Her face wore a triumphant expression as she joined the rest of the party on the veranda. Eila tried to keep the anxious query from her eyes that was present in her mind as the pair approached. But Sydney did not wear the aspect of a crest-fallen lover, though there was a look of wicked triumph in Mamy's face that boded no good from her sister's point of view.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### LUCY MAKES A CONFESSION.

THE conversation had turned upon the all-absorbing theme of the approaching journey. Reginald, leaning against the veranda balustrade, was talking to Mrs. Warden, allowing his glance to wander, nevertheless, towards the two girls (Eila appeared more like a girl than Lucy), who sat in close proximity under the decorative tendrils of passion-vine and convolvulus. Lucy's demure face wore an expression of sedate bliss in presence of the man to whom her heart had gone out unasked. Eila was secretly enjoying the curious sense of conscious power and elation that Reginald's avowal had conferred upon her. Mrs. Warden had been so far struck by it as to observe how well she was looking. It was an ordinary formality with strangers to remark of young Mrs. Frost every time they saw her that she was looking well. Perhaps their real impressions would have been more truly rendered by the use of the word "handsome"; but handsomeness, as we all know, is largely dependent upon health, and in Eila the two seemed to be inseparably bound up together. At the time of her great grief, when she had returned heart-stricken to her childhood's home, her rich bloom of colouring had abandoned her for a while, and no one would have divined how hand-

some she could look upon occasion. It is not the mere colour of the skin that is dependent upon health for its charm; the sparkle of the eye, the lustre of the hair, the polished whiteness of the teeth (as every quack advertisement tells us) rest upon it as well. And besides the possession of redundant health, Eila was going at this time through an experience that seemed to stimulate all the secret fibres of her being. Reginald's vow of undying, unselfish love and devotion lay warm and ever-present at her heart. There need be no alloy of self-reproach or consideration of wrong done to another in her secret. She was robbing no other woman of a love that should have been hers, and in the gratitude and affection she felt for Reginald there was no consciousness of treason. There are women who can detect when one of their sex is under the influence of a sentiment of this kind, by a certain indescribable radiance in her manner, as of one who has found an unexpected treasure. Lucy wondered at Eila's transfigured aspect for the second time to-day. She was one of those who held the theory that all the Clare family were peculiar, and certainly it was strange that anyone placed in the circumstances in which young Mrs. Frost found herself should continue to wear so *débonnaire* and joyous an air.

Lucy, meanwhile, was nursing a daring project in her mind on Reginald's behalf—a project that she would have shrunk from with dismay had anyone else proposed it to her, but that she had begun to regard as actually feasible by dint of harbouring it in her secret imagination. Fancies that we cherish in this way are apt to gain, in the long run, an insidious influence over our better judgments. Familiarity breeds contempt in behalf of ideas as well as of situations, and many of the crimes known judicially as crimes of premeditation are the outcome, we may be sure, of ideas that the perpetrators have shrunk from, in the first instance, as from a kind of ghastly joke. To Lucy it would have appeared at one time a matter of the most monstrous improbability that she should ever deliberately take the first step towards establishing closer and warmer relations with a man who had not even avowed his preference for her. But



the thin end of the wedge had been suffered to insert itself when the idea had first entered her mind.

"Oh, if only what we were told as children could be true, and there were really and truly a little bird that flew about telling secrets, and that could whisper into Mr. Acton's ear that I would joyfully accept him for a husband! It is so dreadful to think that our two lives might be ruined for want of a word in season. Perhaps he only keeps out of my way now for the reason that I am supposed to be an heiress, and that he is so poor and so proud himself."

Between allowing our imaginations to run upon the impalpable little bird of our childish days, and contriving to materialize such a bird when its services are needed, there is but a short step. Lucy set herself to consider whether there was no one among her friends who might be trusted to play the part of the little bird confidentially and discreetly; and when she had reached this point, not without a pitiful sense of helplessness and shame—for the natural instinct that would prompt women to select their own mates is one they are taught to shrink from with horror under our actual social system—it was but natural that Eila's name should suggest itself as that of the bird or the friend in need. Was not the friendship that existed between Mr. Acton and young Mrs. Frost the common talk of Hobart? Was it not a friendship open as the day, and strong in its own blamelessness? Who could be better fitted to give Reginald disinterested and sisterly advice, such as the little bird would have given had its services been available, than Eila? No stronger proof of the utter guilelessness of Lucy's nature could be afforded than her entire faith in Eila's willingness to play the part she designed for her. That friendship for such a woman as young Mrs. Frost might render it difficult for a man to bestow his love in another quarter, or, in other words, that a man who was Eila's accredited friend might not be available as another woman's lover, was a contingency that it never entered Lucy's mind to contemplate. For her there was no tampering with the sixth, seventh, or eighth commandments, an infringement of any of which three seemed to her to bear equal proportions of dreadful

ness. She would not even have suspected Reginald of breaking the second clause of the last commandment of all, and never doubted that Eila's heart, like that of any self-respecting wife under a similar affliction, was dutifully imprisoned in the asylum where her lunatic husband hurled Scriptural blasphemies at all who came within his reach. Before the Clares should take their departure, Lucy intended to bring her courage to the point of delicately sounding Eila on the subject of Reginald's persistent state of bachelorhood, and perhaps of making her understand, at the same time, the main points of the communication that the aforesaid little bird would have whispered into the ear of Reginald himself.

The latter, meanwhile, was far from divining the plans that were being laid for his regeneration. He had been thinking with profound sadness of the coming separation, while Eila pointed out with triumph to Lucy the position of the *Queen of the South*, lying against the wharf in the glassy harbour, with her bare masts tapering skywards, stately and slender in the luminous atmosphere. Reginald did not follow Eila's explanations in the matter. His back was turned towards the vessel. He hated the *Queen*, and everything connected with her. I doubt, indeed, whether the spectacle of the *Flying Dutchman* entering the bay with phantom sails set, and a skeleton helmsman directing her course, could have struck a greater chill to his heart.

"Sydney went over your ship the other day," remarked Lucy blandly; "he said she smelt of apples and wool. But you are lucky to be going to England all the same, and I suppose you are very glad. But don't you dread the 'good-byes'? I should, I know, in your place."

Lucy was complacently sipping her tea as she made the foregoing remark, and the transient, mocking smile, plainly observable to Reginald, that accompanied Eila's reply was all unnoticed by her.

"There are not many 'good-byes' we need shed tears over," she said grimly. "I don't suppose the Hobart people will break their hearts about our going away."

"You naughty thing!" cried Lucy with playful re-

proach ; "and you have so many friends, too." She cast a meaning glance at Reginald, whose blue eyes were looking unusually solemn. "I never go anywhere without hearing it said, 'The Clares are such a clever family. What a loss to the community they will be!'"

Eila smiled, but her eyes remained ostensibly unconvinced.

"What a talent Lucy has for putting things pleasantly!" she observed. "It is so much nicer to be called clever than peculiar, though that is what she really hears us called, if she would admit it."

"No, indeed!" Lucy protested eagerly; "at least, only when it is coupled with cleverness, for surely it is a way of being peculiar to be clever. Stupid people are never called peculiar, are they?"

How far the quality of peculiarity might be said to couple distinction upon its possessors was a question which, however, was apparently destined to remain unsolved upon the present occasion; for Truca created an unexpected diversion by an appeal to Reginald to accompany her to the cow-paddock, enforced by passing two small hands within his arm, and pulling him forward in the direction she wanted.

"I believe my cow knows we're going to leave her," she said mournfully; "she looks at me with such a sad expression sometimes, like that. I've told her you're going to be her master when we're gone; but you've got to be properly introduced to her, you know, so *do* come, please."

Reginald having been led away, Mrs. Warden rose to take her departure, but Lucy interposed:

"If you can't stay any longer, mamma, will you send the carriage back for me? I want to have Eila all to myself for a little; perhaps it's the last time of our being together. Sydney"—turning to her brother—"you can go back with mamma if you choose."

"I don't choose, thank you," said Sydney shortly.

He accompanied his mother, however, down the hill; but though the carriage was seen driving away a moment later in the sole occupation of the four-guinea bonnet and

the mauve and gold parasol, he did not return. Mamy had also disappeared, whence Eila augured that things were going as was fitting.

Meanwhile, she and Lucy were left to the enjoyment of each other's undisturbed society on the veranda.

"There is such a lot I want to say to you," began Lucy, settling herself back in the low wicker-chair in which she was seated. Eila looked properly sympathetic; but instead of proceeding further, Lucy paused, cast down her eyes, and appeared absorbed in the occupation of stirring round the remnants of her tea in the bottom of her cup. When she broke the silence at last, the startling confidence she imparted was as follows: "What nice tea you *do* have at Cowa! I always say no tea tastes like yours anywhere!"

"Do you mean that really, Lucy?" There was genuine gratification in Eila's tone—the complimentary comments on the family cleverness had not been nearly as grateful to her as the praise of their tea—showing that it was possible, after all, to have things "nice" in what she considered their hopeless household. "One is afraid to offer you people tea or anything else; it is all such *grand luxe* in your own home."

"Our own home! Why, we live, as our cook says, 'as plain as plain.' It is very simple fare, I assure you. You should hear Sydney talk about the dinners you give him at Cowa, and the apple-dumplings running over with cream. He always says, 'Why don't we have things like they do at Mrs. Clare's?'"

"Does he? What an absurd boy!" laughed Eila. She did not think it necessary to avow her belief that Love was the sauce that seasoned the Cowa dinner of herbs to Sydney's palate. "I can't compliment him upon his discrimination, I grieve to say; but, of course, it's nice to think such an illusion is possible in any case."

"How do you know it's an illusion?" asked Lucy gravely, "I am sure I would change our way of life for yours."

"I am sure you wouldn't if you'd tried it!" declared Eila shortly.

Lucy seemed to ponder again over something she would have said, but decided upon second thoughts to leave unsaid. She was thoughtfully balancing her spoon upon the edge of her cup, and, after a pause, Eila's speech reverted to the subject that was always uppermost in her mind.

"Do you know, Lucy, when I look at the *Queen of the South* down there"—she glanced at the far-away vessel towering in stripped majesty above the smaller craft around—"and think of all the time we shall have to spend on board her, I wonder sometimes what we shall find to do with ourselves all day. I can't realize somehow that we are going to be nailed to that one little spot in all the wide ocean for weeks and months, with no earthly chance of getting away."

"No waterly chance, you mean," said Lucy, who occasionally hazarded a mild joke of which this must be regarded as a fair specimen. "Yes, it must seem strange. But I hope you don't mean what you said a little while ago, Eila, about people not missing you in Hobart. There are ourselves, to begin with. The place won't seem the same to us when you are gone—you know that. Why, Sydney almost lives here!"

"Oh, your brother will be a little sorry, I dare say," assented Eila, and there was more in her speech than met her friend's ear.

"Look at the family ties you have, too," urged Lucy gently—"that kind old Mr. and Mrs. Frost, to begin with." She uttered the names timidly, with a halting accent. Young Mrs. Frost's brow darkened visibly. A half-imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, that might have signified denial, or doubt, or indifference, or something that partook of all three, testified alone that she had heard the observation. "And there is Mr. Acton," continued Lucy warily; "you are not going to pretend *he* won't be sorry, are you?"

"No, I'm not going to pretend it," said Eila, with a laugh that had something forced in its ring; "why should I?"

"Only that you're so fond of pretending you have no friends in Hobart. I could think of heaps of people besides. I suppose"—Lucy's unyouthful complexion became curi-

ously suffused—"you have known Mr. Acton for a long time, have you not?"

"Pretty long, almost ever since he's been here—nearly two years," Eila made reply, raising her soft dark eyes gravely towards the face of her interlocutress. "Why?"

Lucy answered neither the question nor the look. She had become engrossed once more in her cup and her spoon.

"Give me some more tea, dear. You'll believe I think it nice now, I suppose?" Then, as Eila busied herself with the spirit-lamp and kettle, "By the way, I wonder," she added, in an off-hand tone, "whether there is any truth in a report I once heard—I haven't heard it lately, though—about Mr. Acton being engaged to some girl he knew in England."

Lucy had not uttered these words before she would fain have recalled them. She felt lowered in her own estimation by the artifices to which she had recourse to obtain the knowledge she coveted. Only as it is consistent with human egoism to suppose that people are interested in what concerns ourselves rather than in what concerns them, it did not occur to Eila that her friend could have any private and particular end of her own to serve in selecting Reginald's love affairs for the theme of her confidential talk. On the contrary, Eila's fear was that Lucy might be about to exercise the privilege of a friend, and read her a private lecture upon her conduct in relation to Mr. Acton. It was a suspicion that a little time ago would have made her smile. Fortified by the consciousness of Reginald's loyal friendship, it would have been easy to laugh to scorn the suspicion of carrying on a vulgar flirtation with him. But to-day her position seemed to have changed. From the moment that she had been clasped in Reginald's arms, from the moment that she had realized how frail a barrier held her aloof from him, her attitude towards the world as regarded him had changed. Yesterday she felt that she could return the inquisitorial stare of all the Mrs. Grundys in Hobart with the serene gaze of self-assured innocence. There had not been a single exchange of confidences between Reginald and herself that might not have been listened to by Mrs. Grundy and all her tribe, had they been so minded. To-day it seemed to her

that she would quail under Mrs. Grundy's stare. She shrank from being cross-examined by Lucy. She, a married woman, in a position that was rendered almost sacred by the tragedy that overshadowed her life, to be warned by a girl-companion against undue flirting—to be told most likely that she was, in the expressive French formula, "on people's tongues." Her pride revolted against the notion. Yesterday she would have been amused and brave; to-day a feeling that resembled anger as well as apprehension took possession of her soul.

And while these uncomfortable misgivings were engrossing her mind, Lucy, on her side, was far from feeling at ease. Why did young Mrs. Frost take so long to answer the question put to her? Had she seen through the motives that prompted it? and did she despise the speaker as she deserved? It was quite a relief to Lucy when Eila said, in an indifferent voice:

"Mr. Acton engaged? I never heard that before. Who told you so, Lucy?"

"Who told me?" repeated Lucy guiltily; "I don't quite remember. It was only a surmise, only a rumour. Perhaps I am mixing him up with somebody else. People think, you know, there must be some attraction in England or somewhere, because of his not marrying. It is rather curious, when one comes to think of it, you know."

"Curious? Why?" A little flush overspread Eila's cheek. She was quite sure now that there was a veiled significance in Lucy's words. "People are so absurdly fond of judging for others. I suppose he has his own reasons. He is not rich, for one thing; in fact, he is what mothers with daughters would not consider a catch by any means: he is too poor. He has a mother to keep besides, and she is half paralyzed."

"All the same, there must be plenty of girls who would be glad to marry him, and he might choose one with money, you know," said Lucy naïvely.

"Reginald—Mr. Acton, I mean—is not that kind of man," said Eila, warmly. "He is the last person in the world to marry for money."

Lucy's only reply was a profound sigh. There was a long interval of silence, at the end of which she said bitterly:

"Oh dear! how heavily one is handicapped when one has money, to be sure! How I do hate being rich!"

The form in which this reflection was couched did not in the least detract from its solemnity in Eila's estimation. Neither of these young women spoke slang with malice prepense. When they employed it, it was as unconsciously as Monsieur Jourdain employed prose.

"One is much more handicapped when one is poor," she retorted. "You should try what poverty is like before you talk, Lucy. It is an experiment rich people may indulge in if they choose, though we can't try the counter-experiment of being rich in our turn. I only wish we could."

"Ah, you don't know the drawbacks!" said Lucy, nodding her head sagely. "You don't know what a nightmare the fear of being married for one's money becomes in a girl's life. And, really, there is good reason for it. What you were saying just now about Mr. Acton is an instance. Somehow, I don't believe the men most worth caring about—the proud, honourable, independent natures, I mean—ever propose to a girl with money; they would rather go out of her way. You said as much about Mr. Acton yourself. You said he was the kind of man who would disdain to marry a rich person. I suppose you think he would be more likely to avoid anyone who was looked upon as an heiress, don't you?"

"He might, perhaps," admitted Eila; she was secretly immensely relieved at the turn the conversation was taking; "but he is not everybody. Others might be different. And then there are men with proud, honourable, independent natures, as you call it, Lucy, who have the good luck to be rich as well, and who can afford to marry anyone they please—men whose fortune lifts them above any kind of suspicion, for whom no girl need be too rich or too poor. What do you say to that?"

"Say it bears out what I said," persisted Lucy, with a melancholy shake of the head. "It shows that a girl need not have money to get the best kind of husband in the end.



I had rather the rich man you speak of afforded himself the luxury of having me with my poverty than with my money. It would make me doubly sure."

"Then there is another great advantage money confers," continued Eila doctorally; "it gives one such a power of selection. You can choose out of so many. You might almost make sure of finding the right one at last. Just think what a range of observation you have, Lucy, compared with other people!"

"I don't really know that that is an advantage," said Lucy doubtfully. "I find people less interesting every year—men, I mean. Perhaps I see through them too clearly. But there is one question I want to ask you. Supposing—only supposing, you know—that just such a man as we have been talking about, one of the proud, honourable, independent sort—not at all rich—should happen to please a girl with money very much indeed—supposing she felt she could care for him with all her heart and soul, and that he had somehow given her a little reason to think that he *might* come to care for her in the same way in time, if only the wretched money were not there to put an obstacle in his way, don't you think she would hate having money then, and want to be rid of it, and wish that she could have known him without it from the first?"

A light dawned upon Eila's mind. What if it were as a suppliant rather than as a mistress that Lucy had beguiled her into speaking of Reginald? The supposition was responsible for raising certain curiously conflictive emotions in her breast. The sensation evoked by Lucy's confession—for that the supposititious case the latter had described was none other than her own Eila felt secretly assured—was a feminine, if an unworthy one, and it had a thoroughly feminine origin. Hitherto young Mrs. Frost had cherished Reginald as a friend. She had valued his friendship as a precious element in her existence, but from the moment that she suspected Lucy of bestowing her affections upon him unasked, his value as something more than a friend seemed to increase to a notable extent. She told herself that this feeling was mean and unworthy. Had she cared for Regi-

nald as unselfishly as she believed him to care for her, the probability conveyed by Lucy's words should have made her rejoice for him in her heart. What happier fate could be desired for so good a man than that of being loved and worshipped by a wife like Lucy, endowed, as Eila felt instinctively, with a nature that could love but once and for ever—a wife who would be a crown to her husband in more senses than one; who, in bestowing upon him her worldly goods, would make him rich in earthly possessions; who would heap his invalid mother with largesses, and would joyfully share with him the task of brightening her declining days! Yet, with the contradiction that forms part of a woman's nature, Eila could not bring herself honestly to wish that this happy consummation might be realized. She could not even wish Reginald to desire that a similar piece of good fortune should happen in her own case. Mingled with these feelings there was yet another, in the sense that Reginald's worship of her might be worth even more appreciation than she had hitherto bestowed upon it. Were there not others who could repay it so much more richly in tangible benefits than herself, ready to set the highest of all possible values upon it?

Eila did not formulate the foregoing thoughts in her mind. They floated vaguely through her brain before she replied to Lucy's anxious question. How completely she would have scattered the illusions of her simple friend to the wind, how she would have crushed her virginal hopes to the earth, had she put into words the thought that rose unbidden in her mind! "Poor Lucy!" was the thought; "as if you or anyone else in the world could win Reginald from *me*!" Eila, it need not be said, did not utter her thought. She used her speech in the sense in which Talleyrand discovered the use of speech, for the purpose, that is to say, of concealing it.

"As to wanting to be rid of one's money for the sake of marrying a poor man," she said at last, "I don't see any reason in that, Lucy. I should congratulate myself, if I were in the place of the girl you speak of, that I was rich enough for both."

Lucy's face brightened, but fell again immediately.

"You don't see the difficulty," she said in depressed accents. "How could one accept a man unless he proposed to one first? No girl could. How could one even show a man one liked him, unless he gave one the opportunity? It would be a quite too impossible thing."

"Opportunities are never wanting," said Eila oracularly. "If a girl wants to show a man that she prefers him to every-one else, there are plenty of ways of doing so."

"Tell me only one way," said Lucy eagerly.

"Well, when she meets him at balls, for instance, she might give him all the dances he asks for, and say 'no' to all her other partners."

"But supposing he doesn't dance?" interposed Lucy helplessly.

"All the better; she can give up the dances altogether then, and sit them out with him."

"Yes; but supposing he had begun to avoid one for the reason I told you of—the horrid *question d'argent*, I mean"—Lucy had a French maid, and was not averse to interlard-ing her sentences with an occasional French expression—"just, too, as one was beginning to feel he might like one." In her effort to maintain the conversation upon an impersonal footing, "ones" abounded in Miss Warden's phrases. "What could one do then?"

"One could speak to a friend, as you are doing," said Eila, laughing; while Lucy blushed a pained crimson all over her face and neck.

"Don't be unkind, Eila!" she said imploringly. "I am so miserable sometimes, if you only knew; and there is not a soul I can talk to about it."

"It is he, then?" said Eila interrogatively, with a backward inclination of her head towards the cow-paddock.

Her lips were dry, and her voice sounded hard in her own ears.

"How did you know?" Lucy was holding her head down like a culprit. "Oh, Eila! do you think it is very dreadful to let one's self care about anybody in that way before he has even uttered a single word of love? If it is, I

can't help it. It began more than two years ago—when we were spending the summer here before, you remember. We saw a good deal of Mr. Acton then. I think he went out more than he does now, and he used to seem to like talking to me then—he did indeed.”

There was a trembling intensity in Lucy's tones that surprised her friend not a little. If Eila had been asked her previous opinion of Miss Warden, it would probably have represented her as an embodiment of the placid type of a virgin of the school of Perugino. But the actual Lucy was more like a flesh and blood Juliet than a painted virgin. How to deal with the delicate problem submitted to her judgment was the difficulty that Eila had now to solve. If she encouraged Lucy's flame, she would only increase the bitterness of the disappointment that awaited her. If, on the other hand, she appeared desirous of repressing it, might not Lucy suspect her of a dog-in-the-mangerish desire to keep Reginald's undivided allegiance for herself? She paused for reflection before she remarked diplomatically :

“People would say you were throwing yourself away, you know, Lucy.”

“What should I care what people said?” cried Lucy passionately. “I know one thing: I shall never care for anyone else.” Now that the avowal had been made, she seemed to find a kind of relief in enlarging upon it. “I always thought Mr. Acton nice from the beginning; but it was only after we came away from Hobart last time that I began to think about him so much. When we were up on the station in Victoria, and when we went to Melbourne for the Cup week, I thought of nothing but when we should leave for Tasmania. I was overjoyed the first hot wind day we had, when people prophesied that we were going to have such a hot summer. I knew we should come away all the sooner, and so we did; but it seems we are to go to Melbourne again before long, and it has been a disappointment from beginning to end. If you had not said what you did about Mr.

A error of being taken for a fortune-hunter, I believe I never have had the courage to speak to you; but to explain so much, doesn't it?”

"Y-yes," assented Eila doubtfully, "I suppose it does."

"Do you think, now"—Lucy spoke in shamefaced haste, as though she dared not trust herself to weigh the full import of her words—"it would be possible for you, who know him so well, to find out whether there was anything at all in the attention he paid me last time I was here? I know I could trust you not to commit me in the very smallest degree—couldn't I? You may think it absurd, but I don't believe I could *live*"—there was a pathetic break in Lucy's voice as she uttered this word—"if, without his caring for me himself, Mr. Acton should ever find out that I was—that I was *gone* upon him as I am." For the second time Lucy's feelings found vent in an expression that is not usually associated with deep and tragic sentiment; but its inadequateness passed, as before, entirely unperceived by her hearer. "Couldn't you sound him just a little on the subject, and if what he says should make you fancy that he might have cared for me without my money, why, then you could advise him as a friend—you *are* his friend, I know—not to take the money question into account at all. I would rather give up my share of what I am to have altogether, if it came to that; besides which, I am not rich now at all, you might tell him; my dress allowance is only two hundred a year—not a penny more."

"You don't call that rich!" exclaimed Eila, purposely breaking in at this point; for the delicate mission entrusted to her became doubly embarrassing in the face of her secret knowledge. "Why, I shouldn't know how to spend it if I tried."

"It doesn't go far when one has to go out so much," said Lucy plaintively. "But to go back to what we were saying. The others will be here directly, and I may never have another chance of talking to you alone. Will you do me the favour I want, Eila? There is no one in the world who could do it for me but you; and don't think meanly of me, please. I will trust you entirely; and when you have found out something you might write and tell me. I shall be eternally grateful to you, and I won't rest until I hear from you—you may be sure of that."

For a moment the idea of laying the whole situation bare before Lucy suggested itself to young Mrs. Frost's mind. Supposing she were to say simply, "Reginald loves me, Lucy, profoundly and hopelessly; he knows that nothing can come of it, but his love so possesses his soul that he has no room left for the image of another woman?" The very words in which she would make her avowal had already taken shape in her brain, when a glance at Lucy's face stopped her. It required someone with larger experience of the world, someone possessed of a full share of what has been well called the dramatic instinct, which is, after all, only the outcome of an intensely sympathetic nature, to understand the nature of the tie between Reginald and herself. Lucy would probably be pained and shocked to learn the existence of such a tie; but the first effect of the revelation would be to lower Eila in her eyes, the next to make her bitterly repent of having confided in her at all. How humiliating, besides, for Lucy to feel that she had betrayed her innocent impression that Reginald cared for her in his heart to the person who, of all others, had the best reasons for knowing the contrary! To spare her friend as well as herself, Eila refrained from following her first impulse to reveal the real facts, and, deeming it prudent to temporize, hastened to assure Lucy that she would hold her confidence sacred.

"And not even hint it to your sisters or your mother," urged Lucy anxiously. "I know what a family you are for telling each other things. Sydney says it is like a debating society to hear you all talk on the veranda sometimes."

"Oh! only about vegetarianism, or capital punishment, or something of that kind that matters to nobody," said Eila. "Well, Lucy dear, I am tremendously touched by what you have told me. I wish I had it in me to feel as you do still. It was all killed long ago, I believe. I mean if I were a girl again," she added hurriedly, in answer to the shocked astonishment painted on Lucy's face. "I shall know what I am to find out for you, and I will write to you when there is anything to say; that is a settled matter."

"And you will be able to do it all without giving Mr. Acton the faintest suspicion of the truth?"

"Of course I shall. Nothing could be easier. We often talk people over. But let me say just one thing: Don't be too bitterly disappointed if he should turn out to be a hardened bachelor after all. There are people like that, you know, and it is a mere waste of sentiment to care for them; and then remember about there being as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"What of that? They may stop in the sea to the end, for all I care!" said Lucy recklessly.

At this moment voices were heard approaching the veranda in a descending scale. Lucy and her confidant, who were both afraid for private reasons of their own of going more deeply into the subject of their confidences, started off to encounter the party returning from the cow-paddock. They came upon them in the flower-garden—a mere longitudinal strip taken from the hill that sloped upwards from the house.

Flower-garden it was called by courtesy, for in the tangle of blooms and weeds that encumbered the soil, there was nothing to recall the trim parterres we have learned to associate with the name. Such as it was, thanks to the Tasmanian air and soil, wherein flowers seem to grow, as Mrs. Stowe's Topsy did, for no assignable cause, there was always to be found in it the wherewithal to provide a bouquet of fuchsias and geraniums, bordered by sprigs of fragrant lemon-thyme, for a friend returning to town. It was Dick who undertook to hoe the beds on Sunday morning—less, it is to be feared, in deference to the flowers, than by way of upholding his right to garden on the Sabbath. As no one, however, showed any inclination to call his right into question, his interest in weeding suffered a gradual abatement, and latterly the garden had been left pretty much to take care of itself. Reginald and Truca were discovered seated upon a bench gravely discoursing upon the cow. The bench was under an antiquated gum-tree that would long ago have fallen a victim to the axe, had not Truca pleaded for its life, in behalf of the amber-coloured blobs of gum yielded by its decrepit branches. To a person seated here the view was even finer than from the veranda. In its rear rose magnifi-

cent Mount Wellington, bare to its summit, with patches of dusky purple marking its deeper hollows, its topmost crown softly outlined against the background of shining blue. The hardy shrubs and gaily-painted weeds and flowers wove a garland of colour and perfume round the assembled party, and across the city, lying at their feet, the sea glittered and sparkled beneath the afternoon sun.

We may be sure that the animals are spared one most tormenting factor in human existence—in their freedom from the thing we call sentiment. Provided they can browse harmoniously in a congenial pasturage, all their wants are satisfied. To us who look before and after, life wears a much more complicated aspect. What might be the precise degree of sympathy that Reginald felt for her was the problem that occupied Lucy's mind upon the present occasion, to the exclusion of all enjoyment of the beautiful scene and the agreeable society around her. And Reginald, in his turn, was more exercised by a similar problem in behalf of young Mrs. Frost than by appreciation of the sun-steeped landscape outspread before his eyes. The Cowa estate was situated upon a declivity, and might be easily clambered over (walking was not a term that could be fittingly applied in such a connection) within a quarter of an hour, and a bright descending panorama of houses and trees was visible from every point. But for the reasons I have mentioned, its brightness failed to impress the actual beholders of it.

Eila contrived, however, that Lucy should be left alone with Reginald for a few moments before the party broke up, but the experiment did not tend to raise Miss Warden's spirits. Mr. Acton did not afford her a loophole for making even the most innocent advances. Certainly her money was a more effectual barrier than she could have supposed. Worse still, when she timidly offered him a seat in the carriage to town with her brother and herself, he declared that he preferred walking.

It was hardly to be wondered at if but few words were exchanged between the brother and sister on their homeward way.



"They are awfully kind people, the Clares, if they *are* a little peculiar!" Lucy had remarked. "It is a pity Mammy is not a little more *soignée*. I thought her quite pretty to-day."

And Sydney had grunted some inarticulate words in reply. If he had said what was in his mind, it would have been to the effect that his friends at Cowa could do without Miss Lucy's patronage. Had the real nature of his sister's meditations been divulged to him, it would have caused him almost as great a surprise as a similar discovery with regard to his own secret thoughts would have occasioned Lucy.

For it was his private opinion, when he thought about the matter at all, that his sister was of the stuff of which old maids are created; while Lucy, for her part, looked upon her brother as a good-natured hobbledohoy, who would not be ripe for love for a long time to come. Nothing would have astonished them more than to learn that they were undergoing almost a precisely similar experience as regarded their first initiation into the mysteries of love. So true it is that those who live side by side may have no insight into the hidden workings of each other's natures.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### EILA AS EMISSARY.

THE interval that elapsed between the conversation with Lucy in the veranda and the final departure for England passed like a troubled dream. Eila could never look back to the last days of her sojourn at Cowa without an impression of vague bewilderment and unrest. A second-hand furniture-dealer had agreed to take their household goods off her mother's hands; but they made so poor a show when they were dragged in their battered nakedness into the searching light of day, that the family felt almost ashamed of owning them. Mrs. Clare's estimate of the sum they would fetch proved to be exactly eleven times and a half what the dealer

offered. Willie advised that they should be left behind to be sold by auction, but the money was needed for the boardship outfit. As many things as could be parted with were therefore carted to town a few days before the departure, and the family slept upon the mattresses and bedding, prepared for their bunks, spread upon the bare boards. There was more than one heartrending leave-taking to be gone through—notably with the Jersey cow, the successor of Snow-white and Strawberry, and with the brown retriever dog, the former being transferred to Reginald, and the latter to Sydney. I think Reginald would have been better pleased to keep the dog, whose curly head he had so often seen Eila fondle in times gone by; but the cow was a sacred charge laid upon him by Truca, and was also a link with Eila in her own way.

The veranda looked more than ever like an old curiosity-shop during the last days. There were so many objects, utterly worthless in themselves, with which the family had, nevertheless, sentimental associations, that the difficulty was to know what to leave behind—Truca's ancient collection of dolls; piles of manuscripts and drawings of Dick's; old school-books, music, and copy-books; presents that had been broken and never mended, and that the recipients were loath to leave behind; odds and ends of stuffs and household bric-à-brac that Mrs. Clare cherished under the impression that they possessed an intrinsic value of their own, apart from the use they had rendered her. All these had to be thrust away and wedged into the spare spaces in the packing-cases and trunks that encumbered the place. Mrs. Clare's spirits rose to the occasion. She and Dick revelled in the disorder, and for five consecutive days dinner represented a kind of movable feast, spread out in the guise of tinned sheep-tongues and penny buns, upon the top of a packing-case or a corner of the kitchen table, the only one that remained. Eila found that, despite all there was to do, the time passed unsatisfactorily enough. With no more clocks to consult, the hours would sometimes seem to fly, whereas at others they would drag wearily through a whole afternoon. It was comfortless to walk through the dismantled rooms, strewn

with a litter of paper and straw, of crumbs and dust. But this was the normal atmosphere in which the family now dwelt; and had it been for no other motive than that of feeling tidy once more, Eila longed for their going away to be finally accomplished.

The evening before they sailed Reginald came to Cowa in the dusk for the last time. Eila was already in her boardship attire, everything else having been packed away on the *Queen of the South*. It was of some shrunken gray material, that left her wrists and ankles exposed, though the neck was encircled by one of the blue-white paper collars of which she had laid in a store in view of the impossibility of having linen washed on board. No less becoming dress could well have been conceived; but to Reginald's thinking its sole effect was to make the wearer look pathetically young and irresponsible. The excitement of the approaching change lent a strange lustre to her eyes. All her emotions had been called into play, and they seemed to have infused a new intensity and rare glow into her expression.

She had come out to Reginald as he opened the garden-gate in the twilight, and now accompanied him to the bench under the decrepit gum-studded eucalyptus, where it was their wont to sit of an evening.

"We had better stay outside," she said, as she seated herself by his side. "Dick is making no end of dust in the front-room, though there is little result from it; for he came upon a loose page of our old anthology—'It must be so, Plato; thou reasonest well'—and, of course, he began to spout it to mother; and when I came away they were arguing about the concluding part, and looking everywhere for the next leaf to see how it went on. I left them then, for I have been packing ever since tea-time."

"You have not been tiring yourself too much, I hope," said Reginald, looking at her anxiously. "You don't look quite like yourself this evening."

"Don't I? It's this absurd old frock that I grew out of years ago."

"No; it's your face. You look etherealized somehow—a little pale too. What have you been doing all day?"

"What have I been doing?" repeated Eila gravely. "Two not very happy things, you will say. First, I have been to see my husband, and secondly, I have bought some poison."

Reginald looked at her quickly. There was a deliberateness in her manner of speaking which prevented him from supposing that she was making an ill-timed joke.

"What do you mean?" he asked almost gruffly. "What do you want with poison?"

"I don't want it for myself—at least, not now—so you need not look so angry. Indeed, I hope we may never have to use it all our lives. But knowing the risks we shall run at sea, and the horrible deaths of lingering agony we might have to endure if the vessel caught fire or foundered in a gale, mother and I agreed that the best thing we could do would be to find some kind of swift, sure, painless poison." She enumerated each of these qualities in an impressive voice, having obviously rehearsed the sequence many times. "Enough for the whole family. If all hope were over, and we had no alternative left but to die like rats in a hole, it would be the greatest consolation to know that we could at least die together, and comfortably, without too much suffering. Don't you think so too?"

She put the final question doubtfully, though in giving her explanation she had seemed to be quite carried away by her own earnestness.

Reginald did not answer immediately. He was sitting a little bent forward, with his elbows resting on his knees and his hands covering his eyes.

"I don't wonder people say you are a peculiar family," he said at last, uncovering his face, and looking moodily in front of him, "with the wild ideas you are all so ready to take up. You talk of dying like rats in a hole. I should think an all-round poisoning would be the nearest approach to that you could make. The whole idea is foolish and dangerous. It doesn't hold water. You never can say, no matter in what extremity you may find yourself, whether you will not be rescued at the eleventh hour. Why, I read of a man the other day who was sucked down—sucked right

under, mind—with a sinking ship. It's impossible to say how far he went below, but he rose again with some wreckage, floated clear of the vortex, and got saved somehow. Where would *he* have been if he had been coward enough to drink your poison, I should like to know ? ”

“Better off than if he had gone through what he did, perhaps,” said Eila promptly. “Life would cost too dear if one had to buy it back upon those terms. If I had got so far into the valley of the shadow of death, I should not thank anyone for pulling me out again. That man you speak of must feel as though he had died once already, and now it will all have to be gone through again.”

“Well, then, there's another thing,” continued Reginald, unheeding her objections. “As you know nothing about the exact degree of danger to which you may be exposed, there is a risk of your going to the poison when there is not the least excuse for it. There are Cape Horn gales any landsman might be a bit frightened in, though they're nothing when you're used to them. I shan't have a quiet moment now I know what you've got in your minds. I shall picture you, every time there's a bit of a toss, doling out a dose of strychnine”—he shuddered—“like Lucretia Borgia or Mrs. Manning. For God's sake, Eila,” he implored, “listen to reason ! Don't go away with any thought of taking your own lives. Think about getting to your journey's end as fast and as comfortably as you can ; that's quite enough. It would be just as reasonable to keep a stock of poison here at Cowa on the chance of there being an earthquake or a landslip, as to take it along with you on board ship. My only consolation is that no chemist would give you what you wanted. I believe your sure and painless poison would turn out to be a little rose-water when you came to test it.”

“That it wouldn't,” cried Eila emphatically. “The chemist's assistant who sold it to me used to be our garden-er's boy years ago, when I was quite a little girl, and though he was much bigger than me, it was I who taught him to read. I used to teach him in the wood-shed in the evening. You know, he could never have got on as he has if he

hadn't first learnt to read. He thinks all his success in life is owing to it, and he is ever so grateful. He needn't be, of course, for it used to be fun to teach him; but I know he would not deceive me. I went one day to the shop when his master was out, and I told him the whole story: why we wanted the poison, and how it must be of a kind that could not hurt. I told him everything, in fact, and he understood thoroughly. First he begged and implored me, just as you are doing, not to use it. He opposed my idea on every ground, especially the religious one; for he belongs to the Baptists here, and goes to chapel on week-days as well as on Sundays. It was all no use; I made him yield in the end. He said he was committing a sin knowingly, and that I was the only person in the world who could make him commit it; but he gave his consent all the same in the end, and to-day I went for the bottle. It is in blue glass, octagonal, in a screwed-down metal case, beautifully contrived; but nothing would make him tell me what it cost. I could not induce him to take a penny for it. He said it would be like receiving blood-money. That reminds me. I wish you would buy things at his shop, or give him a present, if it could be managed. I am sure my commission must have put him to trouble and expense."

"I will do so," said Reginald, "without fail;" and he entered the name and address that Eila gave him in his note-book.

"There, that is enough about the poison," she cried, when he had finished. "I promise we shall not go to the bottle—how funny that sounds, doesn't it?—unless we have good reason for it—unless a worse death should actually be staring us in the face. Try and forget I told you about it. You said you must know *everything*, so it is a little your own fault. Now I have another favour to ask of you."

"A favour!"—he interrupted her with a deprecating gesture; "don't speak of favours between you and me, Eila."

"Well, a thing, then. It is not a pleasant charge. It is miserable to talk about, and it will be even worse to do. I want you, please, at least once every month to pay a visit to

my husband at the asylum." He bowed his head. The mute assent conveyed a more solemn assurance than the most vehement declarations in words, and after a pause Eila continued in an agitated voice: "It was sadder than you can imagine to-day. I went with old Mr. Frost by the coach yesterday, and came back in the steamer this morning. You know how lovely the river passage is to New Norfolk between those magnificent rocks. Well, I cannot see it now without shuddering. It is full of such cruel associations for me. To-day it was sadder than ever. My husband was walking about in the small reserved enclosure in the big garden under the high walls, preaching a sermon with all kinds of gesticulations in a muttering, delirious voice that made his words sound like cursing. They were curses, too, I believe. All the maledictions, the 'woes unto you,' the 'anathema maranathas' one can find throughout the Bible. One of the keepers was with us, and I stood between him and old Mr. Frost just within the door, and tried to make my husband hear. I said, 'Charlie, you do remember me, don't you?' as clearly as I was able, for my voice seemed to choke me somehow when I spoke. He looked round then for a moment. As long as I live I believe the recollection of that look will haunt me. There was a kind of horrible, ghastly, threatening mirth in it that made one's blood run cold to see. How well I understand the idea people had in olden times that madness was only being in the possession of a devil! You could feel that there was nothing to appeal to in the face—nothing to save you from whatever death-torture the diabolical fancy of the mad brain might devise. The keeper made us move away quietly. We were only just inside, as I told you. He kept his eye on him the whole time. Then, when we were through the door, I heard a kind of wild scrabble, followed by a perfect torrent of texts from the Old Testament about women, and the things for which they were to be stoned. Oh, it was horrible! horrible!"

Reginald felt her shiver in the warm evening air. Instinctively he held out his hand for hers, and enclosed it in his large warm grasp that seemed to promise all kinds of re-

assurance and protection. Furthermore, he placed his disengaged arm about her waist, and drew her nearer to his side.

"My darling," he said tenderly, "you are going away, and you know you are everything in life to me. When I think of your position, I find myself wondering whether, after all, I am best befriending you by putting myself on the side of the laws that govern society. It is monstrous that you should be debarred from finding some compensation for the grievous experiences you have been through. Some of the best and most beautiful years of your life have been spoiled—irretrievably, for you can never get them back. But you have many left. You are the sort of woman, Eila, to make a home a kind of paradise for your husband and children. People pretend there are limits to earthly happiness. I suppose the happiness of being loved by you, and living with you, is beyond what can be looked for in this world. But I sometimes think if I had been richer and cleverer than I am I would have tried to persuade you to come away with me in spite of everything. Situated as you are, I believe you would be justified in making a fresh tie, even though society might not sanction it. As for me, dear, I think, if it were any way possible, my love would be stronger for the thought that you had no legal claim on me. It would seem to make you so completely my own. I am a matter-of-fact fellow, as you know; but there are times when I picture to myself what life would be if I could sail away with you to one of those South Sea Islands we used to cruise around when I was on the *Clytie*, and I get a notion of such dazzling, bewildering happiness, it almost hurts me to think of. Even as things are, you know that if you made the least sign I would throw everything over and follow you round the world."

He looked at her with wistful passion. Her eyes were luminous in the gathering twilight; they wore an intent, listening expression.

"And your mother!" she said; "and mine, and Mamy and Truca! How wretched we should make them all! You would not be a bit happy, nor I either."



"What right would they have to be wretched?" he cried vehemently. "What business have they to sacrifice you to a false and conventional standard? Let them put themselves in your place before they judge. Besides, I think I know your family better than you do yourself. They have never troubled themselves much about the world's opinion—that is certain. They go their own way more than any people I ever saw. I believe that even now, if I were to talk to your mother seriously, and to tell her I wanted to devote my whole life to you, always supposing you cared for me one half-quarter as much as I do for you, which you don't—I believe if I were to argue with her and get her to look at the matter in its true natural aspect—not through society glasses, but as it really exists—it would not be so hard to get her round to my way of thinking. That doctor from the *Prinzessin* used to air theories that would have made another person's hair stand on end, and I have heard her agree with them all."

"Ah, but you mustn't trust her," said Eila, with a meaning laugh; "you'll find yourself dreadfully deceived if you do. You don't know mother. There's nothing you couldn't convince her of at the time if you get the best of an argument. That's where she is so different from other people, and so delightful to argue with. But it doesn't last. It never lasts. The next day she has thought of something else, or her feelings have spoken, which are much stronger than reason, and she has gone back to her old way of thinking more strongly than ever. So if I ran away with you as you propose, you might expect mother to go with us to the station, and wish us joy and a pleasant journey and all that kind of thing, under the influence, of course, of all you had been saying; and when we got to Launceston, we should receive a frenzied telegram from her, imploring me to return instantly to save the family from perdition and I don't know what besides."

Reginald smiled, but it was a gloomy smile.

"I can answer for my own poor mother better," he said: "she is the tenderest-hearted creature in the world, and would kiss the feet of my wife if she really loved me. But she has hard and fast rules about the duty of wives and hus-

bands that nothing can move by a hair's breadth. You see from her own point of view she is logical enough. She believes life here is only a probationary stage, and that you must accept the worst trials as a special token of favour on the part of the Almighty, since, by coming out of them triumphantly, you score so much to the good hereafter. She would believe, if we came together now, that we should have to expiate it eternally in another state; not like Paolo and Francesca, who, at least, were 'blown together on the accursed air'—I found that line in 'The New Republic' you lent me—but in frizzling separately in the lower regions. Out of consideration for her feelings, I should never let her know the truth."

"I wonder she can be happy, though, with such a belief," said Eila meditatively.

"I used to wonder, too; I don't now. You see, she has the primary, the fundamental belief that infinite Wisdom is controlling it all. Can't you see what a difference that makes? The very appearance of cruelty becomes merely a test of faith. People made like her believe they believe in hell, and act as though it were an existing fact; but they don't let that or anything else destroy their fixed belief that all is wisely ordained. After all, those who think at all for themselves need not go to the doctrine of hell in search of a motive for doubting that there is a good Providence. They may find it quite ready to hand in the world about them."

"Yes; but suffering has its term here at least," put in Eila; "it is the *going on* of the other that is so diabolical—though, for the matter of that, the going on of anything without knowing how you are to stop it does not bear thinking of, and don't let us talk of it. It frightens me." She drew a long breath. Then in an altered voice: "You *will* write to me, then, every fortnight?"

"Every fortnight—yes—and as much oftener as I can."

"And you will tell me every scrap of news that concerns yourself—for the confidences are not to be all on my side—especially if you meet anyone who makes you think a little less of me."

"Especially if I meet anyone who makes me think a little less of you. But how can I meet her if she has no existence?"

"You can't tell that—one never knows. What a pity it is our last evening! I shall be tormented to-morrow with the recollection of a hundred things I wanted to say—and you will never know them now."

"Put them down," he said eagerly. "Every scrap of your handwriting will make me so much the richer. Never mind if it is about the veriest trifles; that is just what I shall most want to hear. The important matters can take care of themselves. Never stop to think what you put in your letters. I want the words to come warm from your moods, just as I am used to hearing you say them."

"Then you must write like that, too," said Eila, nodding her head. "You must tell me how many quarts of milk the Jersey cow gives, and how often you meet Diocletian." (Diocletian, it may be explained, was the retriever dog, so named in virtue of the resemblance between his much-curved coat and the sculptured presentment of the Roman Emperor's hair.) "Sydney is taking him, you know. By-the-by," as a sudden thought struck her, "you do go and see the Wardens sometimes, don't you?"

"Only when they invite me to a tennis afternoon, or a dance, or something of that sort, that I shall never go to when you are gone," said Reginald indifferently.

"You ought to go," she insisted; "you can condole with Sydney when we are gone. I am going to tell you a secret about him—he cares for Mamy."

"What! Mamy has an admirer!" exclaimed Reginald, smiling. "I have always looked upon her as quite a little girl; but I am delighted to hear it, all the same. I believe young Warden is a first-rate fellow, though he wants licking into shape a little; and rich, too—there is no doubt of that."

"That makes no difference to Mamy," said Eila dolefully. "She is terribly trying; just because it would be the best and most reasonable match in the world, she sets her face against it. She refused Sydney point-blank the other day;

only he has managed to persuade her to promise that she will listen to no one else for a year."

"I suppose it is a pity," said Reginald reflectively—"from a worldly point of view, at any rate; and she can't take to him, you say? I believe myself he is the best of the lot."

"Oh, but Lucy is nice, too!" exclaimed Eila deprecatingly. Her promise to her friend rose accusingly in her memory. "You do think she is nice, don't you?" she added pleadingly.

"What do you call nice?" said Reginald, laughing; "to me she is entirely uninteresting. She does not even seem like a flesh-and-blood woman; only like a laced-up cardboard or guttapercha kind of imitation of one to hang fashionable dresses upon. I am sure she hasn't an idea or a thought that hasn't been put into her by her pastors and masters. She goes to balls as she goes to church—by rule of thumb. She does everything automatically, even to visiting old Mrs. Hunter over the way."

Eila made a protesting gesture.

"Poor Lucy!" she interrupted him; "how little you know her! It is incredible that one person should judge another so falsely."

"You say it is false?" said Reginald. "But I don't think you are a good judge. Miss Warden wakes up, I dare say, in your society. Some people have the faculty of *radiating*, you know—they warm and brighten everything that comes within their influence; and you are one of those people. But to outside mortals like myself, she is very commonplace and uninteresting. If I wanted you to understand the difference between you and her, from a man's point of view, I should have to go back to the age of gold when the earth was young, and to picture a landscape with airily-clad figures in the foreground. You would be just in your place in such a setting; you would seem to belong to it, as though you had grown out of it. But Miss Warden!"—his voice assumed an unconscious inflexion of pitying disdain—"what a poor, inappropriate, shivering figure she would cut! She would be nowhere without the latest fashionable clothes. What is that saying about God mak-

ing the country, and man making the town ? I should say Nature made you, and the milliner made Miss Warden."

He stopped, and Eila, though she laughed in a vexed way, did not immediately reply. The moon had risen and deepened since they had seated themselves on the bench, and the descending garden looked weird and bleached under her pale rays. The soothing sounds of coming night blended themselves into a soft, discordant chorus, chanted in a subdued key. There were feeble chirps and squeaks from the birds in the apple-trees, and a whining accompaniment that sounded now near, now far, from the mosquitoes circling in the air. The crickets and grasshoppers whirled and snapped above and beneath the bushes, and a distant sound of whistling or singing from the veranda below stole upwards through the darkness. Eila revolved the words she had heard for some time before she answered :

"I believe you are rather an exception in your way of judging—I hope you are, at least. Men like women to be beautifully dressed, as a rule ; I don't mean expensively only, but suitably, in soft colours that harmonize well, and in things that fit and are fashionably cut. Your chief grievance against Lucy seems to be that she wears pretty things, and that they are made in the latest fashions ; yet you say yourself—what was it you said ?—that she would be such a "poor, inappropriate figure" without them, and yet you blame her for wearing them. You are very inconsequent and unjust."

"I blame her ! Not in the least," he declared. "I say she is dependent on her dress and on her teaching, that is all, for being what she is ; and I am indifferent to people who have no objective individuality of their own, either physical or mental—they don't interest me."

"That is such an unreasonable charge !" complained Eila. As an introduction to the sounding of Reginald's heart on Lucy's behalf, the conversation seemed by no means promising. "It all comes of not knowing her. You say you like to do things for me. Well, will you cultivate Lucy's acquaintance a little, for my sake, when I am gone ? Talk to her by herself—no matter about what—just as you

talk to me. Not quite like that, then," as she felt rather than saw the indignant disclaimer provoked by her words, "but as you used to talk to me when I first met you; and then write and tell me whether your opinion has not changed a little."

"And if it should—what then? What is to be gained by it?" he asked, with a certain surprise in his tones. "That I like to do things for you, as you call it, goes without saying; but here you want to inflict a useless penance upon another person, as well as upon me, for I don't think Miss Warden would be particularly grateful to you for inciting me to bore her when you are gone."

"On the contrary," said Eila gravely, "I think she would be very grateful to me, and very, very glad."

She said the words so solemnly that Reginald checked his rising inclination to laugh. To a man who had been anything of a Lothario, her affirmation could have borne but one interpretation; but besides the fact that there was only room for one image at the present time in Reginald's heart, he had never looked upon himself in the light of a conquering hero, as far as women were concerned. If it had not been too dark to allow her to see his expression, the look of almost alarmed perplexity that her words had brought into his face might have amused his companion in her turn.

"What *do* you mean?" he said. "I am a bad hand at taking a hint. You don't want me to run away with the absurd idea that Miss Warden honours me with her preference, do you?"

"What would there be so surprising in it if she did?" retorted Eila, with soft-voiced, unconscious flattery. "It is always the round man in the square hole in this world in everything. I haven't the least right to betray Lucy to you; only you are not like ordinary men. If you thought she cared about you hopelessly, you would not be vain about it; you would only feel pitiful, and perhaps more kindly disposed towards her than before. Besides, you should not have spoken as you did just now; it seemed to egg me on to tell what I knew, just to show you how mis-

taken you were. You say Lucy is made of cardboard and guttapercha," with a scornful little laugh; "whereas in reality she has much more of a steadfast woman's heart than I have. I know it; I feel it. I don't say it is a merit; she is made so. Where she places her affections, she makes a sacred, durable shrine for them. Nothing could alter her. She dresses as you see because her mother likes it; besides, I suppose it is a habit. I would do it, too, if I could afford it; I should love to do it. She is not the less a woman for that, with a strong nature and a very feeling heart. I thought men looked upon constancy to one ideal in a woman as the most beautiful quality she could have. I don't know why; but I believe they do. Remember, I know Lucy; I have had talks with her in which we have gone far below the surface—deep down beneath the little conventional crust at which you have stopped short, which you have never pierced, and on the strength of which you think you are entitled to pronounce an opinion. Well, you will have to own yourself wrong. I have said enough now to make that plain to you, I hope; and for the rest, many men would think that, even without her money, Lucy Warden's love was not a thing to be despised."

She stopped a little out of breath. Her emotion had spurred her on to talk rapidly, without a pause or break. Several times Reginald would have interrupted her, but she paid no heed to him. Perhaps the very certainty that she was pleading a hopeless cause lent additional energy to her manner. She did not deliberately set herself to simulate generous sentiments in Lucy's behalf, but she could not help feeling that it was easier to feel generous, easier to constitute herself Lucy's champion with the foregone conviction that Lucy's cause was lost, than if there had been any risk of her gaining it.

"Is the prisoner at the bar to have a chance of being heard?" Reginald asked humbly; and as she made no reply, he went on hesitatingly: "If you are not mistaken" (she shook her head energetically),—"well, then, granting you are not mistaken, I need not say that what you have told me is a very great surprise to me. Of course, I take

back a part of what I said. Gutta-percha women have not got hearts. They don't even take fancies that I know of. But granting, as I said, that all you have been telling me is a fact, what would you advise me to do? What is to be the upshot of it all? Do you counsel me to cultivate Miss Warden's acquaintance without delay?"

He put the question carelessly, but his heart was beating with painful suspense as he awaited her reply. Eila was almost deceived by his tone; they had entered unwillingly upon a game of cross-questions and crooked answers. What if his allegiance to her had been really affected by the unexpected revelation she had made him? Could it be possible there was a remote chance that she might gain her friend's cause after all? Then what signified the moonlit vows on Mount Knocklofty—the protestations of eternal, unswerving love and constancy she had heard? A little bewildered, vaguely apprehensive, moved withal by the desire to be loyal at all costs to her friend, Eila answered in a constrained voice:

"Of course I counsel you. Lucy is as good as she is rich."

There was a dead silence which seemed to last an interminable time to the couple on the bench. Then Reginald said in a dry voice:

"You advise me to see her, then, with a view to marriage? Is that how I am to understand it?"

A simple "Yes" rose to Eila's cold lips, but she changed it for "That is the advice I *ought* to give you as a friend——"

"Never mind the ought!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "You would advocate it from your own point of view?"

"Well, it would be what all your friends would consider a tremendously lucky stroke," she said guardedly. "A wife who would idolize you, and bring you a big fortune besides."

"Oh, Eila, Eila!" cried Reginald, and for a few moments he said no more.

Nevertheless, if he had uttered the most eloquent and beautifully-worded appeal in the world, his protest could not have sunk more deeply into his hearer's heart. So deeply did it sink, indeed, and so clearly was it read by her, that



she clasped his arm spontaneously with her two hands, and rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, while she said only these three words, "Do forgive me!" which had the effect, however, of the sweetest balm poured into a wound.

They sat silent for awhile, and he stroked her head in token of forgiveness.

"Why do you like to try me?" he said. "Is it to show your power? That is an old story, surely. Why, you almost made me believe for a moment that you expected me to take your words seriously. Do you know what it means when a man loves a woman as I love you? It means that no other woman exists for him in the world. That if a fairy-tale princess, with diamonds dropping from her mouth with every word, were to offer herself to him, he would turn away from her. I don't believe you understand that kind of feeling. You said just now you had not the quality of steadfastness, but you inspire it in others, if you don't feel it yourself. Of what use would it be for me to cultivate Miss Warden's acquaintance? The sooner she forgets my existence the better."

"What a number of different ways of loving there are, to be sure!" exclaimed Eila, irrelevantly—"as many as there are people who feel it, I believe. I am sure there must be many men who would say in your place: 'Well, since I can't have the woman I would have fancied, I will give up thinking of her, and just keep her as my friend; and meanwhile I will make the best of life with a wealthy, loving, virtuous young woman as my wife.' Don't you think there are many men who would argue in that way?"

"Not if they felt as I do. Besides, I can't and won't give up all hope as long as you and I are above-ground. I would love you with wrinkles and white hair as I love you now. And long, long before that time we may have found a solution."

"That is another way in which you are different from me," she said regretfully. "You can wait and be brave. It always seems to me, when a thing is worth having, it is worth having *now*, or not at all. I cannot tell whether I may care for it even by-and-by. I suppose natures are dif-

ferent. We can't make ourselves feel other than we do, can we?"

"I don't know. I suppose the feelings may be moulded too—to a certain extent, at least—by the will. But, then, which acts upon which? That is always the puzzle. As you said just now of Miss Warden, it is no merit of mine that I am constant to you. I simply can't help myself. I don't believe, all the same, that there is anyone else who would have had the power to develop the faculty of constancy in me to the same extent. Promises of fidelity mean nothing. You can't promise to feel. You can only promise to act, and the action is worth nothing without the feeling. I won't ask you to keep your affection for me as I keep my love for you. If once you come to think of it as a duty, it will have pretty well ceased to be. But I will ask you to make me a promise, Eila, and to keep it, and that is, first to tell me the truth about everything. Don't hide things out of consideration for me. There is no suffering you can inflict from which I might not recover; but to deceive me, that would be indeed dealing me my death-blow. I deserve your confidence—I do indeed, my dear. Supposing I had used such influence as you have let me gain over you to persuade you to run counter to social conventions; or if not to run counter to them openly, to let us be all in all to each other in secret? Supposing I had worked upon your fine, pitying, sympathetic nature to induce you to surrender yourself wholly and entirely into my hands, don't you think"—he spoke rapidly and nervously—"don't you think matters might have ended so?"

"Yes," Eila answered.

Her head was bent, and the moonbeams seemed to trace her silhouette in silver by her lover's side. Her simple answer moved him inexpressibly; the chivalrous as well as the passionate element in his nature was stirred to its depths. He bowed low over her hand and pressed his lips to it deferentially.

"You are my queen and my darling," he said humbly. "Whatever may come in the future, I hope I shall always have the strength to be glad that these years of our friend-

ship have passed as they have. I know that from the ordinary point of view I have acted like a fool—the greater fool, perhaps, that the kind of scruples which weigh with other people have no weight with me. My conscience would not have reproached me if you had been indeed what the old romancers called ‘my lady love’ all this time. I would not have worshipped or venerated you the less; but I would have introduced a disturbing element, a terror, and an unrest into your life. I should have proved that I loved you for myself—in short, more than for yourself. You understand?”

“Yes,” Eila said again; and he continued once more:

“Then I may believe you will give me your trust and your confidence, by right of my love for you?”

“I will indeed,” she said earnestly. “I will tell you everything, I promise you.”

Reginald was fain to be content with this assurance. But after he had torn himself away from her, and was walking down the rough road through the moon-steeped radiance of the summer night, misgivings and forebodings that made the future lie black before him crowded upon his mind. He loved her so dearly—so dearly! It was because he loved her after so exalted a fashion that he had refrained from avowing his passion to her until she was on the point of leaving him. But he could not say even now whether he had acted wisely; he could not be sure that he had taken the best means after all of ensuring her fidelity to him in the future. Supposing he had persuaded her to regard her first miserable marriage as a thing to be disregarded, and had bound her to him, as wives are bound to their husbands, by a tie the stronger for its secrecy? Might she not have looked upon him then as her very lord and master, and have remained heart and fancy-proof even when she was separated from him? Might she not, indeed, have refused to separate from him altogether, and have braved the world? No, he could not have let her do that in this little place, where the stones aimed at her glass house from every hand would have wounded and well-nigh crushed her. But might she not at least have remained under the roof of her father-in-

law, and have given Reginald such hours as she could spare ? If his renunciation had but procured him the loss of this imaginary Paradise, cast her loose, too, upon the world, instead of attaching her to an anchor of safety, how bitterly, how eternally he would rue it ! If it had but exposed her, with her impressionable, exotic nature, her irresistible attractions, and her defenceless position, to become the mark of someone less scrupulous, less tender of her than himself, how more than ever, how unavailingly, would he repent himself ! The very thought made him shiver in the warm night air. On the other hand, if, by teaching her to deceive, he had exposed her to a different kind of danger, what then ? Had he not read in some French novel, wherein he had come upon some other wonderful truths, that a woman might have no lovers or several, but rarely one alone ? Supposing he had only succeeded in inclining her to lend a readier ear to the next person who should impress her fancy after she had gone far out of his own reach ? That was a thought not to be harboured, not to be borne for an instant. Reginald walked far past the little cottage he shared at Sandy Bay with his mother, under the influence of the dreary thoughts that pursued him. The scene around him might have whispered peace to a less troubled heart than his, for town and harbour lay wrapped in a silver dream. Not a leaf rustled, not a ripple stirred upon the water. It was as though Nature herself had feared to break the spell. And while he was hurrying along the road, blind to the calm beauty of the night, Eila at the cottage was seated in her own little room writing a letter, with deep intervals for reflection. She had only her mattress on the littered floor for a seat, only a lead pencil, with a page torn from an old copy-book, for her writing materials. But Lucy must not be kept waiting. Poor Lucy ! Even now, perhaps, the strain of hope deferred was keeping her awake while all about her slept. Eila tried to temper her news as best she could. It could not be very wrong, she thought, to employ a subterfuge in the telling of it.

"DEAR LUCY" (said the letter),

"I would have written before, but, indeed, I have had no chance of speaking until this evening. I am sure Mr. Acton likes you very much; but, Lucy dear, it seems there is a reason, after all, for his putting marriage with anyone on this side of the world away from him—for the present. You hinted at something, you remember, when we were talking about this matter in the veranda, and I dare say you were right. You must look upon that as the reason if he does not go out much or accept many invitations. I should try and put it out of my head for a time if I were you, especially as many others are ready to kneel at your feet. I wish I had more satisfactory news, but I can only give my impression for what it is worth. I don't think the money would be an insuperable obstacle if the heart were still free, but I have strong doubts of that after the conversation I have just had.

"Your affectionate friend,

"EILA.

"P. S.—You will forgive the scrappy paper and the pencil. Everything is packed up, even the ink and pens."

This letter did not reach its recipient until after the writer's departure. The only line that detached itself from the rest like a golden rift in a black cloud was the line, "I am sure Mr. Acton likes you very much." But to Lucy's great sorrow there was no longer any opportunity of cross-examining her friend as to the means by which she arrived at this knowledge. The *Queen of the South* was already lost to view, and the degree of liking professed by Reginald must remain at the unsatisfactory stage of a tormenting hypothesis, to be interpreted in its best or its worse sense, according as Lucy was borne up by heaven-high hope or cast down by cruel and sad despondency.

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## CHAPTER IX.

## THE VOYAGE.

HOBART HARBOUR had never looked brighter or glassier than upon the night when the family from Cowa was rowed on board the *Queen of the South*, lying some three or four hundred yards away from the wharf, in readiness to haul up her anchor and sail away with the morning breeze. Tug there was none. Dependent upon the winds of heaven alone, the *Queen* would have to spread her canvas and tack down the bay and out into the stormy ocean as best she might. Mrs. Clare and her children represented the only contingent of passengers, save a paralytic old man who had come into a fortune in the Old World when all power of profiting by it had left him, and who was therefore a striking illustration of the truth of the cynical French proverb that Providence gives us nuts when we have no teeth left to crack them with.

Mrs. Clare and her children were placed in possession of the stern-cabins. Among the smaller craft in the harbour, the *Queen of the South* appeared worthy of her royal name; and as the family from Cowa climbed on to the poop-deck, and surveyed her length from stem to stern, they compared her in turn to their long veranda at home, to the manifest disadvantage of the latter. Their point of view changed, however, next day, when those sinister-sounding contrivances called "dead lights" having been put up over the large ports, the stern cabins were converted into dark dungeons, and the occupants thereof lay sick unto death, heedless of the crazy tumbling and staggering of the frail little ship abandoned to her fate in the midst of the mighty Antarctic waves. The heavy Cowa trunks that were not as yet lashed to the posts of the bunks in which the travellers lay, slid over the uncarpeted floors, and collided against each other as the storm increased. The shrill shrieking of the wind was an appalling sound to unaccustomed ears, and the creaking and groaning of cordage and timbers was only less terrible than the occasional heavy thuds that marked the onslaught of some giant wave upon the vessel's stern, caus-

ing her to shiver from end to end, as though some mighty hand had seized her by the keel and was shaking her wildly to and fro.

These early experiences came upon Mrs. Clare and her children as a terrific and crushing surprise. For the first few days they lay like souls in purgatory, writhing in their cold and dismal prisons. A horrible feeling as of being caught in a trap from which there was no escape had taken hold of their minds. They had been warned that they must expect little alteration in the weather until such time as they should round Cape Horn, but the date when this glorious consummation might be looked for was as vague as the one fixed for the advent of the millennium. Shortly after they started, two Tuesdays were crowded into the same week, "as though," said Mamy, "the weeks were not already seven days too long for all we have to suffer in them." Eila's misery was sixfold increased by witnessing the wretchedness of all the beloved members of the family. Each one suffered according to his temperament—some uncomplainingly, the others clamorously.

Dick, who had maintained that vegetarians and Buddhists were never sick, or that being sick they retained their "philosophic calm," was one of the worst. His groans were audible even in the cuddy, where the morose captain and his mates dined at one upon scalding pea-soup and bruised boiled fowl. At the end of five purgatorial days, Eila took heart of grace. Someone, she told herself, must set an example, unless they were to have recourse to the desperate expedient of emptying the poisoned bottle among them. That it would come to this in the end, she was occasionally driven to fear, especially upon nights when the wind blew so furiously that the vessel seemed lost in a boiling sea of foam, and even to stand upright for an instant was a physical impossibility. The reflection brought such a sickening clutch of anguish with it, that upon one memorable night she could bear it no longer. With her knees trembling beneath her, she threw a shawl over her head—she had been lying half dressed on her bunk—and staggered up the companion-way to the deck. The hatches were only half closed, and she was just able to

put out her head and look around her. Her hair, which had been tightly coiled up a moment ago, was torn down by the wind. She felt, as the long dark locks streamed out behind her, as though the whole mass were being pulled away from the roots by invisible hands. The vessel lay under close-reefed topsails, and the noise of the gale, as it rushed howling through the bare rigging, was like the yelling of an army of demons. The night was dark, but the reflection of the starlight from the lashed-up foam showed that the vessel was lying at an angle which made it appear like death to walk across the deck. There could be no thought of seasickness now. A kind of numbness that was almost resignation seemed to creep over Eila as she contemplated the awful scene. "I do not see how any vessel could live through such a tempest for long," she reflected in her ignorance; "but all thought, all feeling would be battered out of one's brains by those waves. I should think one would be knocked down breathless and swept away in an instant, and surely there would be no sense or consciousness of suffering after that. It would be a more dignified way of dying, too, than by sneaking to the bottle of poison." In the midst of her reflections a careless movement in steering on the part of the two sailors lashed to the wheel caused the *Queen* to ship a tremendous sea. A mighty wave swept over her deck, almost submerging her under its terrific mass. She staggered from stem to stern. Eila, drenched from head to foot, seeing the water rain into the cuddy and swirl over the floors of the stern cabins, had the presence of mind to rush below and cry in a voice whence she strove with desperate calm to expel all hint of the heart-sick terror that moved her. "Such fun, everybody—I have had a salt shower-bath!" and thereupon she ran to encircle Truca in her arms. The little girl was shivering and whimpering with cold and misery. She had been dreaming of the green paddocks of Cowa, wherein she had been blissfully milking her Jersey cow upon a fragrant summer's evening. But the cow would not stand still, and the milk-pail rocked to and fro; the milk had streamed on to the grass, and Truca awoke to see the salt water dashing over the cabin-floor.



"Oh, let us go home, Eila!" cried the child, sobbing and clinging to her elder sister; "tell the captain we all do want so badly to go home again. Mother wants to, and all of us."

Eila tried to preach reason and patience, but her words carried scant conviction, even to her own ears. The terrific turmoil above seemed to drown the sound of them. If the truth must be told, she was privately very much of the same opinion as Truca; and there was nothing, even to the Chevalier's picture and the imitation ruby, that she would not now have gladly thrown overboard in consideration of being landed safe and sound with all the rest of the family upon Hobart wharf. To look forward to the arrival in England seemed little more practical than to look forward to landing in heaven. In fact, the last-named place, if it existed at all, seemed much the more probable goal of the two. It is needless to say that under these conditions the beginning of the journey was not auspicious. And yet, before the first fortnight had passed away, Eila and her brothers and sisters—such is the elasticity of youth—were dancing up and down the slippery decks in the chill, ice-laden air of the desolate Southern Ocean. They had passed New Zealand, and were in the region of gales, icebergs, and white squalls. "In these seas," says the chart, "there are few signs of life."

They saw no vessels, and but rarely a whale. The smallest incident in their lives became an event to be talked about for days. The sweeping away of fifty fowls in a gale, the capture of a shining white albatross, and the speculations after he had been chloroformed by the mate, despite all Dick's counter-arguments concerning the future fate of the spiritual essence of albatrosses, all these were subjects of the deepest interest. Upon a vessel of five hundred tons the crew is necessarily small. Before the Horn was reached, the Clare family knew the names and histories of every mate, every able seaman, and every deck-swabber on board. They knew, besides, the names of every sail, spar and rope, and could take the ship's bearings with a little help from Mr. Jonson or Mr. McKenzie, the first and second mates, as well as though they had been destined to a seafaring life. Upon a French vessel, these young men—they were young

men still, though there was a Mrs. Jonson at Poplar and a Mrs. McKenzie in Glasgow—would have lost their heads, if not their hearts, under the influence of the beauty of young Mrs. Frost. But Mr. Jonson and Mr. McKenzie had not a drop of French blood in their veins, and belonged to the race of unconscious heroes who, in trying to act up to the principle they have learned in the Catechism, of doing their duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased their God to call them, practise a daily code of self-denial by the side of which fastings, flagellations and hair-shirts are as nothing. There was the most entire good understanding between the Clare family and these simple and loyal sailors. Eila forgot for the nonce that there was a great wearisome solid earth, for which they were bound, where everybody was trying to push everybody else out of his place, and became as simple in her thoughts and aims as the people about her. Dick renounced vegetarianism under the irresistible temptation of pickled pork and peas upon a day when the cold salt air overhead had rendered him ravenous. What with gales and violent winds, before which the *Queen of the South* was powerless to run, it was six weeks before the Horn was rounded. Never would the travellers forget the eventful day when this great feat was accomplished. The sea was calm as a lake, and its sapphire depths showed deep-lying emerald gleams. Two ships, the first that had been seen, were sighted, and Truca shed tears at the idea that there were other human beings besides themselves at Cape Horn. A distant iceberg appeared like a glittering jag against the horizon, and the snorting whales spouted reckless fountains in honour of the travellers. With the vessel's prow turned northwards, the family began to think that England might possibly be nearer after all than heaven. Then came the fierce pamperos, sweeping down the South American coast at Pernambuco, and the tearing gales of the roaring forties. Thereupon increasing warmth and sunshine, during which the afore-mentioned sinister dead lights were taken down, and the stern-cabins submitted to a spring cleaning, while Mother Carey's chickens fluttered brightly around the vessel's stem. And now the travellers entered

the Tropics, and were driven by the Trades towards the Line. Here the *Queen* had a fit of the sulks. For eight mortal days she stretched and groaned in the steaming Doldrums with her sails flapping drearily to and fro, while the sea appeared to turn stagnant and greasy around her. Hideous sharks swam close to the vessel's side, and Eila read the "Ancient Mariner" to her brothers and sisters in the midst of the realistic *mise-en-scène*. It was unspeakable joy to wake one morning and hear the lapping of the waves beneath the port-holes. The awful calm, the unnatural stagnation was over; the *Queen* had wakened, and was walking through the waters like a thing of life once more.

The last interest was that of fishing for seaweed and shells in the Sargasso Sea; then came a final toss in the Bay of Biscay, followed by the overpowering excitement of entering the English Channel. At this point a change came over everyone on board. The steward, a little man with an amount of dignity in inverse proportion to his height, and two eyes that took contrary directions—the one being fixed on his lazareet, and the other on the lookout that no disrespect was intended—relaxed visibly. The captain, who affected taciturnity, not to say grumpiness, became almost loquacious. Even the paralytic passenger accomplished the half of a smile. Mrs. Clare and her children were in a condition of jubilant excitement that found vent in filling their diaries with pages of impassioned word-painting respecting the green English coast, as smooth as a billiard-table, and the gleaming chalk cliffs that supported the marvellous turf. Their emotions upon passing up the Thames to the docks were so keen that, when night came, they were literally worn out with the work of wondering. It was a fine night, and, marvellous to say, the air was comparatively clear. The mighty city, with its lights "flaring like a dreary dawn," lay close at hand. Next day they would walk through those wonderful streets, and see with their bodily eyes the dome of St. Paul's, and the Parliament clock, and the Tower, where Lady Jane was beheaded. They had been familiar with all these from the time they could speak; but the rapture of beholding them face to face had

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seemed utterly impossible of realization in those early days.

The family held a last meeting in the stern-cabin on the eve of their final departure from the *Queen of the South*. They had Gravesend prawns and fresh butter; best of all, the Gravesend pilot had brought on board a bunch of sweet-smelling daffodils and a basket of English strawberries. The strawberries were amazingly dear, and the daffodils were not to be had for nothing; but one does not come to England every day. Mrs. Clare changed the first of the sovereigns belonging to the slender hoard that was to go so much farther, and to do so much more, than any other hoard in the world; and though the Gravesend strawberries could not be really said to compare with the Cowa strawberries, every member of the family declared them to be the most wonderful and delicious they had ever tasted. It was the same with the butter, which was not like the butter they had obtained from Truca's cow. But were they not close to the dome of St. Paul's and the Tower? and could butter and strawberries with such associations as these be anything but the best butter and the most delicious strawberries in the world?

Next day it behoved the family to leave the *Queen of the South* for good. Dark and dreary prison as the vessel had appeared in their eyes during the desolate days of the early part of their journey, they were inclined to look upon her now as an ark of refuge. She was already abandoned by the mates and the crew, and with every fresh departure there was a fresh and heart-rending leave-taking to be gone through. Mrs. Clare, with Willie and Mamy, went up from the docks to Bayswater in quest of lodgings; while Eila, with Dick, Truca, and an old caretaker from the docks, remained upon the deserted ship. To while away the time, they made-believe to navigate the vessel on her way home from the Antipodes. Dick shouted orders through his hands from the captain's bridge, while Truca stood at the helm. One rang the appointed number of bells from the bell upon the poop-deck, while the other responded by striking the cracked bell upon the forecastle, and making it echo the

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sound. Eila meanwhile counted for the twentieth time the boxes and cases that represented the family belongings—seventeen in all—without counting shawls and rugs made up into various emigrants' bundles. She did a great deal of thinking as she wandered up and down the familiar poop-deck through the long June afternoon, looking now at the masts of some wonderful East-Indiaman at hand, by the side of which the *Queen* looked pitifully small and mean; now directing her gaze towards the vast mysterious city upon whose threshold she was standing; anon looking over the vessel's sides at the rank, city-soiled water of the docks. A strange lost feeling crept over her during her solitary watch. Oh for one friend only to come and take them by the hand, and bid them welcome to this unknown land! What rapture it would be to have Reginald come down to meet them, and lead them to a place he had made ready for them! Dreams of this nature were so much more satisfactory than the reality, that Eila gave herself up to the planning of a long and delightful romance in which Reginald was supposed to have made a gigantic fortune in mining shares the very week after the *Queen of the South* had sailed. Naturally his first thought was to follow his friends home in the mail-steamer, and to take a furnished house for them in one of the places Eila had read about—Hyde Park, for instance, or Tower Hamlets; she had not the least idea where Tower Hamlets might be, but the name sounded green, and homely, and historic. She even composed the phrase in which he would tell them the news, and planned the exact drive they would all take the next day to the Crystal Palace, to Hampton Court, and, if there was time, to Madame Tussaud's as well. She had got to the point of their starting all together upon a European tour which was to embrace Venice and St. Petersburg, when, to her great joy, the rest of the party returned. It seemed untold ages since they had gone away in the morning, and she welcomed them back as though they had returned from an expedition to the North Pole or the heart of Central Africa. Dick and Truca were summoned by a shrill "Coo-ee!" from their posts of responsibility on the bridge and at the helm.

The little girl had been overwhelmed by Dick's condescension in taking her play seriously, and had spent a very enjoyable afternoon; but a dinner of condensed milk and yesterday's rolls had inclined them all to be hungry, and they greeted their mother with effusion in the expectation that she had come to take them to supper and bed on shore.

Mrs. Clare, however, looked dismally tired—more tired, indeed, than they ever remembered seeing her. She had an almost weather-beaten air, and there were dark rings under her eyes. Willie and Mamy also wore a solemn aspect. Their faces were lined with dust and railway smoke. One carried a bag of buns, the other some slices of ham wrapped in paper. The grease had worked through, and Mamy had taken off her gloves to save them. The first thing the trio did was to sink down upon the bench by the skylight, from which they had so often seen the bulwarks climb above the horizon and sink below it again as the vessel swung and rolled through the long monotonous days spent upon Atlantic waves. During the voyage the bench had served the double duty of seat and hen-coop, and had been carefully avoided by Truca from the day that her hapless calves had been pecked at through the grating by an inquisitive fowl. Now it was as empty as all the rest, and the family might seat themselves along it in an undisturbed row. Mamy was the first to break the silence.

"London is too big!" she said despondently. Her voice sounded weak and cracked with fatigue and underground railway smoke. "And, oh, so dirty, you can't think, Eila! First we went over forests of houses with red roofs. I thought they would never end; and such miserable houses! Then we got to an enormous dark railway-station, with crowds and crowds of people. The air smelt so funny, and everything looked huge and dingy. After that we went in a train in the dark for I don't know how long, and we came out among streets and houses with dingy gardens in front of them. It was still London—all London; and then we looked for rooms!"

"And are we going to them now?" cried Eila in tones of trembling expectation.

"Ask mother," said Mamy gloomily. "All I want to do is to get into my own little berth and stop there."

"We will leave the ship to-morrow, children, I hope," said Mrs. Clare, in answer to the appealing look cast upon her by the others. "But London is all changed since I knew it; it is not the London I remember; and rooms are horribly dear; and I might have thought it was the season."

"Then we must undo all our rugs again," said Eila dejectedly, "and camp down on the bunks; for the mattresses are stitched up in canvas. Dick and I did them up this morning. Well, it won't matter for one night. And now shall we have tea?"

"Mother is just dying for tea, and so am I," said Mamy.

"There's some tea left, but nothing else; and we must bribe the old caretaker to let us stop on board for to-night." Eila looked doubtfully in the direction of the old man. "Willie, couldn't you find some place close by where you could get a loaf and some milk? and then we can get our tea on the skylight, you know."

Thus it was that Mrs. Clare and her children spent the first night of their arrival in the great capital of the world. This was their opening experience of the renowned London season, within a stone's-throw, or, rather, within a few minutes by railway, of all the most marvellous appliances of nineteenth-century luxury and civilization that the mind of man can conceive. They dared not adventure themselves in any of the dingy-looking eating-houses in the neighbourhood of the docks. Even Willie's short absence in quest of a loaf caused them more anxiety than they had ever known when he had set out upon a Bush tramp of indefinite duration in Tasmania. They remembered all they had ever heard or read about mysterious and never-accounted-for disappearances in London, and Mrs. Clare mentally resolved that henceforth they should never go out less than two or three together. Perhaps, indeed, it would be as well for all the family to go in one party everywhere, upon the principle of there being safety in numbers. People were never garrotted in large parties, as far as she knew. Willie's return with the loaf was hailed with a shout. It had been already pro-

posed that Eila should go with the caretaker in quest of him. There was still a tank of fresh water on board—the allowance had been scant at sea, but now they might revel in it, if they pleased—and the steward had left a clean tea-cloth in a forgotten corner, which did duty for a towel. When the travelled trio had washed underground soot and smoke from their eyes and hands, they came much refreshed to the supper Eila had prepared on the skylight. It was late in June, and the air was dank, but warm. The long twilight was a joyful discovery to be made the most of. It was nearly nine before the supper, consisting of a pasty-looking London loaf, cold ham, buns and tea, was all in readiness. The number of cups and glasses, even counting the one from the washstand below, only came to four; but Dick went shares with Mamy, and Eila with Truca. Fortunately, it was possible to boil their kettle by means of a spirit-lamp, unearthed from the bag of linen for the wash. Thus it came about that the Clare family supped merrily, like shipwrecked mariners, in the very heart of London. But their spirits rose with the ham, the tea, and the buns. The very next day they would be sure to find rooms exactly suited to their tastes, and not too expensive. Restored by the tea and the rest, Mamy gave a concise and graphic account of the day's adventures. She described the fine lodgings they had been to at first, and imitated the disdainful sniff of the landlady upon their asking to see the rooms. She acted the scene in which they had tried to look as though the bedrooms were too small, after the price—an outrageous one—had been named. She related how, upon boldly mentioning the price they could afford to give at a modest-looking house in a back street, the landlady had said "she could give 'em a basement, but nothink more for that," and had led them triumphantly down a dark staircase to an underground room, covered with oil-cloth, in which was an old gentleman, with spectacles and a nose like a radish covered with knobs, who had shaken hands with Mamy, and asked her huskily if she would like to see his collection of butterflies.

"I thought the season was like the weather," said Mamy in conclusion, "something that everybody in London had a



share in and a right to enjoy; but I see it isn't that at all. I think it's only meant for people who are dressed differently from us."

"And I thought you looked so nice, all in your Hobart mantles, and Willie with his best suit not a year old, when you left the ship this morning," said Eila in a pained voice.

"Well, perhaps it isn't our clothes, after all. I don't know what it is; but if you could see how people stared at us, and how the landladies, the ones who condescended to listen to us at all, looked at us!"

"They looked as if you were country cousins, I suppose?" said Eila cheerfully. "Well, we needn't mind that."

"Oh, it was worse than that! Some of them had a look of suspicion and contempt. And when I remember how in Hobart everybody had a smile and a nod for us, to-day I had a feeling of terror when I thought how awfully alone we were."

"Well, it's done now," said Willie, "so we'd better make the best of it. I've got my recommendation from the bank to back me up. I mean to look for a billet as soon as we're any way settled. Good night, mother. I'm going to camp down upon the forecastle. We'd better be all off in a body to-morrow morning. The captain said we could stop on one night, and we'd better not wait to be told to clear out, for that's what it'll come to next, I expect."

"I wish I knew if people could help doing things in this world," said Mamy.

"I don't believe they can altogether," said Willie.

His brothers and sisters looked up in surprise. It was an extremely rare occurrence for Willie's voice to be heard when the ever-recurring metaphysical discussions were started by the rest.

"How do you know whether they can at all?" queried Eila slowly. She paused, as though seeking for words to appropriately clothe a thought that had been long turned over in her mind. "I have very often thought," she continued—"I don't think I've said it before—I have very often thought, though, that perhaps what people call the "course of time" may be really only a kind of slow unfolding of

some tremendous chart, upon which every single event, the biggest and the tiniest, that is to happen in the universe, is stamped beforehand in indelible ink."

"The 'as it was in the beginning' and 'is now, and ever shall be, Amen!'" said Dick, with a lugubrious laugh. "Well, if that is so, our journey home was traced on the chart before we were born, and—we couldn't help ourselves."

A dismayed silence fell upon the group, until Truca's childish voice was piped in plaintive protest:

"But what a trouble for anyone to make such a chart, and to put all the mistakes in too, and then just to sit down and wait for them all to happen! I don't see any good in that."

"It will have to be made clear to our spiritual essences by-and-by," began Mrs. Clare.

But as this assertion was the accustomed signal for a discussion of indefinite length, and as the stars had now come out, the family crept below, to stretch themselves upon their hard couches and wish they were back in the Tropics—even at this pass they could not wish themselves back near the Horn—with their dinner of boiled fowl and bacon a prospect to be reckoned upon with certainty for the morrow, and no thought to be taken for the securing of their bed and board.

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## CHAPTER X.

### IN PARIS.

EVOLUTIONISTS tell us, and our own experience has taught us, that improved conditions of living are conducive to the maintenance and propagation of the human race. Yet we occasionally meet with instances—as in the case of the Australian blacks—where the substitution of clothes and houses for bare bodies and the naked earth has the unexpected result of destroying rather than preserving the

individual. If, on the other hand, we apply the experiment in an inverse sense, and take an ordinarily healthy man in the prime of life who has been born in what is called the lap of luxury—who has had his coats made at Poole's, and his rooms warmed by hot-water tubes—and place him in the same conditions as those which surround the primitive man, we shall find, to our surprise, that he will adapt himself admirably to the new order of things—that he can subsist upon fish and roots, can sleep upon the ground, can make shift with the skins of wild beasts for a garment, or even, if the weather is warm, with the sole skin that Nature has given him at his birth; and that, far from dying under this unfamiliar *régime*, he will frequently, as Rip Van Winkle says, “live long and prosper,” the prosperity being understood naturally in a purely physical sense. What are we to infer from this fact? That the higher the organism, the more easily it can adapt itself to altered conditions; or only that it is always easier to descend than to mount in the scale of being, whether we regard ourselves as social units or merely as superior specimens of apes.

If the former hypothesis be correct, it is to be feared that the Clare family had not as yet reached the height which makes descent easy. They could have adapted themselves, certainly, like the gipsies, the savages, or other of the children of Nature, to living under a tent or in a waggon, provided there had been open spaces to roam over, and the free air of heaven to blow in their faces; but the lack of elbow-room consequent upon being crowded together in a few dingy rooms was a change to which they could not accustom themselves. Even at Cowa there had been occasional friction. Members of the same family are not intended by Nature to live all together under one roof after they have reached a certain age, any more than the pea-pods are destined to remain pressed in the same husk when they arrive at bursting-point. While individuals are yet in their infancy and childhood, they have the resource of sparring and fighting, a process more conducive to the establishment of fundamental good-fellowship than the good Dr. Watts suspected; but when they reach the age of reason, they are

deprived of this wholesome outlet for their preponderant individualities.

Among Eastern races, where rigid custom so moulds the individual that he has little or no identity of his own, and where an entire class is submitted to the authority of an autocratic patriarch, adult family life may perhaps be carried on smoothly enough. Not so among our independent Western communities, where all the members feel and think for themselves, and where many among them are endowed with passionate individualities and strong idiosyncrasies. In their case it is difficult for grown-up members of the same family to live in entire harmony in each other's unrelieved society. That no house is large enough to shelter two families is a proverb of Western origin. The very points that brothers and sisters share in common serve to disunite them, for defects we tolerate in ourselves become intolerable when we see them reflected in others. In fact, notwithstanding the deeply-rooted affection that members of the same family will and do profess for each other, they are often obliged to own that they "get on" better with strangers.

Lack of elbow-room did not, however, cause the members of the Clare family to "fall out" and rage and fight (to quote Dr. Watts again) at this crisis of their lives. They felt, indeed, more inclined to cling to each other than before by reason of their utter loneliness. The Clare family fled from London to Paris almost as soon as they had regained the possession of their luggage from the docks, carrying away only a nightmare impression of the bewildering marvels of the mightiest of cities. Their first attempt at housekeeping in Paris was to "camp down," in the most literal sense of the word, upon the fourth story of a large house on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, the which, as denisons of the Quartier Latin know, is but a new and showy enlargement of the noisy Boulevard St. Michel. This part of Paris, indeed, tacked on to the old classic precincts of the Pantheon, the ancient Church of St. Geneviève, and the venerable Musée de Gluny, is all brand-new and modern. The locality pleased the wanderers—in the first place, because it allowed them to look

across a wide open space, with a fountain in its midst, that lay in front of the house, to the gardens of the Observatoire, an offshoot of the Luxembourg Gardens farther down, while a wide expanse of gay green tree-tops greeted their eyes every time they looked forth from the little balcony in front of their rooms; in the second, because the changing scene in the wide space below was an amusing aspect of Paris life to watch from their windows. All kinds of unfamiliar sights and sounds called them to the balcony at odd moments. Now it was a monster tram that went rolling by, the conductor blowing his note of warning upon a dreary horn that emitted a sound like a donkey's bray; then the workmen in blouses, or the fat hatless women, in neat black skirts with white morning camisoles, who sat on the top. Grisettes, with their shiny black hair coiled up in unimpeachable twists, passed below the windows; little soldiers in their uniforms of blue and turkey-red; students of every colour and nationality—from the coal-black *élégant* of the Isle of Bourbon or Martinique, in the latest cut of coat, to the unkempt Russian Nihilist, the American *élève des beaux arts*, or the *rapin* from the provinces. Most of the men carried a portfolio, a book, or a box of colours; everyone had the badge of his calling. The family from the Antipodes beheld the life around them as though they had been dropped into it from another planet; they had no comprehension of it, nor it of them. In the general way, visitors to Paris of the country cousin or tourist kind gain some slight knowledge of the inhabitants and their customs from the conversations they hear in the pensions at which they stay; or, failing this, through the yet more insufficient medium of hotel-life and the theatres. But none of these sources of information were at the command of Mrs. Clare and her children. They had drifted to Paris with bag and baggage, had left their luggage at the Gare du Nord on a July morning, and had straggled in a band of five in search of shelter. Willie was not with them. Through the recommendation of the manager of the Tasmanian branch of the bank to which he had applied in London, he had been taken on for a short time to supply the place of a junior clerk who was ill.

The salary was barely forty pounds a year; but Willie had snatched at the opportunity, and, in the proud sense of being left behind alone, self-supporting and independent, in the wonderful city of London, was perhaps the least to be pitied of the exiles. As to the remainder of the family, they had turned their gaze to Paris as to a kind of Promised Land. They had studied a map of it, and had learned that the Luxembourg side of the river was less dear than the Élysées side.

Towards the Luxembourg, therefore, they had directed their steps, and after a fruitless search in quest of furnished apartments, which seemed to be all ludicrously beyond their means, had "fetched up" in front of a gaunt new building on the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, placarded all over its yet damp walls with "Appartements grands et petits a louer presentement," in great capitals. There were two concierges, a man and his wife, who occupied a dark den at the back of the entrance-passage on the lower floor, and to these they had applied for information. The man was small and evil-looking. The woman was large and bore a falsely jovial air, for there lurked a something in her eye which betrayed that it would not be well to fall out with her, and that reminded Eila of Victor Cherbuliez's warning that it is well in this lower world to be on good terms with your conscience and your concierge. Both concierges stared at the travellers with suspicion in their look. It was evident that they had no accredited protector with them, for Dick was a minor, and therefore did not count. The male concierge consented, however, to lead them up the four flights of stairs that led to the *quatrième*, and to show them the apartment they coveted. Wearied out with their long trudge and the dusty glitter of a July day in the noisy Paris streets, they could have found it in their hearts to sit upon the staircase and weep. The rooms, nevertheless, excited their enthusiasm. There were three with a front view upon the Place de l'Observatoire, and one in the rear that overlooked a small courtyard enclosed by the backs of a block of prodigiously tall houses. The aspect of this yard was as the abomination of desolation, in its foetid darkness. It was almost impossible

to see to the bottom of its gloomy depths. The sides of the houses surrounding it were smirched with hideous stains. Its very existence suggested a nightmare of being "hurled headlong to bottomless perdition," and the family turned away from contemplating it with a shudder. The front rooms, however, they declared with one accord to be "jolly." The house was new, and the ceiling of the centre-room was painted, to Truca's immense delight, in imitation of the sky, with a lark on the wing darting across it. The floors were of highly polished wood. There was a miniature kitchen at the back, somewhat dark, but still large enough to allow a full-sized person to turn round in it, where the concierge patronizingly informed them they could "*faire leur petit tripot*." No bath, but water laid on in the kitchen, and small stone balconies in front of each window, wherein, if one were not over-stout, one might wedge a chair and sit as in an opera-box, with the Place de l'Observatoire for a stage. It was certainly a dizzy height to look down from, but the concierge declared proudly that it was a view "*comme on n'en trouve pas—quoi!*" His final "*quoi*" was a kind of challenge to contradict him if you dared, and though the July sun flooded the rooms oppressively, it could not be gainsaid that there would be compensation in looking out by-and-by upon the red and gold of the sunset sky across the summer greenery of the Luxembourg Gardens. The mention of the rent, which amounted with the "*contributions*" to little less than fifty pounds, sent a shiver through the family collectively; but they reflected that, if it came to the worst, they could always do with less food and clothes than other people, and that air and space were the first necessities of all. Eila for one declared herself vehemently in favour of securing the rooms without delay, and the matter being put to the vote, only Dick was found to enter an objection on the score of the vulgarity of the decorations. Now the pale sky-blue ceiling with the lark, and the gilt-edged panels, that adorned the largest room, had exercised a powerful fascination upon the others. That the rooms had been devised to attract an entirely different order of occupants from themselves, and that the mirror in particular

had been designed as a bait for some *petite dame* with blackened eyelashes, was a matter of which they could not well be expected to have any knowledge. Mrs. Clare declared her readiness to pay the first quarter in advance, and was even business-like enough to give the concierge, unasked, the "gratification" he was looking for, in return for allowing the family to enter into possession the same afternoon. She shared her children's enthusiasm for the gilt panels, the lark on the wing, and the view, and pointed out to them all the advantages of being once more in the midst of civilization. London had grown too big, she declared. It was like an unwieldy monster, of which the proportions were all swallowed up in superfluous flesh, but Paris was the embodiment of harmonious perfection. Dick wished to be informed of the area and population of Paris as compared with London, by way of establishing some standard of judgment; but Mrs. Clare evinced her accustomed fine disdain for facts and statistics, and the argument between mother and son was carried on to the utter forgetfulness of the business in hand. Matters, however, did arrange themselves somehow ultimately, and steps were taken to convert the garish apartment into the semblance of a home. Well might the family feel, in contradiction to the poet's words, that things were *not* what they seemed. The novel surroundings induced in all alike a curious and dreary sensation of dreaminess and unreality. Never could Eila forget the impressions of that first night spent in their Paris home. Dick had been sent to the Gare du Nord, armed with the mysterious slip of paper that was to release the things of which the family stood most in need from the depot. Mamy stayed with her mother to aid in receiving and arranging them, and Eila, with Truca holding her hand, went out provender-hunting in the neighbourhood. She purchased some bread, a mysterious kind of meat-mosaic, known as *charcuterie*, and a bottle of milk, besides the few indispensable articles that were needed in the shape of a kettle, one or two kitchen utensils, a table, and some chairs.

How the small hoard of money melted away under these successive outlays is not to be told. Evening found the



travellers still engaged in the process of camping down in their rooms. They had their board-ship mattresses still—one apiece—and their pillows, which were distributed on the floors of the three rooms.

“Like the Japanese,” said Eila cheerfully. “After all, climbing into bed is a very superfluous thing.”

The blankets were short. It was never discovered who had appropriated the two best between the London docks and the Paris railway-station; but, fortunately, the July nights were warm, when a little covering goes a long way. The rest of the furniture was composed mainly of trunks, that bore dreadful evidence of rough usage in Cape Horn gales and railway depots. It is not easy to furnish a home artistically with mattresses and trunks; still, if we have a roof to cover us, and a mattress to lie down upon, we are better off even then than countless myriads of our fellow-creatures, and of this fact the Clare family reminded each other now.

Their first meal, however, in their new home could not honestly be called entirely satisfactory. To go out and dine comfortably at a modest restaurant was a commonplace, practical idea that would never have occurred to them. Restaurants were dangerous places when you had no previous knowledge of them. Mrs. Clare believed that they were conducted upon the fixed principle of taking people in—not in the good sense of the word. Besides, what a dreadful waste of money that might be so much more profitably spent; and that, to tell the truth, was sorely needed, to spend it upon mere eating and drinking. It is true that there were difficulties in the way of arranging a supper for five people with the aid of a small spirit-lamp and a new kettle for all utensils. For instance, the boiling of the eggs in the kettle is not always an assured success. To fish out the egg with a small spoon is to run the risk of breaking it, which is fatal both to the egg and the water of which the tea is to be made. Yet so inured had the family from Cowa become to these minor disasters, that when a catastrophe of the kind occurred, and the water Dick was boiling for the tea was converted into a kind of egg-soup, it excited nothing but a burst of hysterical hilarity from the rest.

"It won't spoil the tea," Mrs. Clare remarked, when the laughter had subsided. "Now I think of it, people sometimes stir an egg in their tea instead of milk."

"But not a half-cooked one, mother," remonstrated Eila. "They don't make tea with thin egg-soup, either; but, I suppose, no one cares to wait until the kettle boils again; and what are we to do for egg-cups?"

"Use bread, of course," said Dick scornfully.

He had made no comment upon the episode of the egg.

"But there's no salt," remarked Truca dolefully. "Eggs are so horrid without salt."

There was an uncomfortable pause. Every member of the family was dead-beat. The four flights of stairs were very steep, and by the time the salt should have been procured from the grocer's next door, what would be the condition of the eggs? Dick, nevertheless, rose reluctantly, when Mamy quickly interposed:

"No, not you, Dick. Why, you carried all the mattresses up yourself. I'll go."

"Your hat, Mamy!" shrieked Eila after her. It was hard to sacrifice the last vestige of superiority at the very outset of their settling in Paris. "And buy another cup and saucer—the commonest you can get; or else you'll have to share a tumbler with Truc for your tea."

Mamy darted off. She did not stay to look for her hat, after all, and more heads than those of the concierge turned round to bestow a long stare upon the auburn locks as she hurried into the neighbouring shop and asked in Ollendorff French for "some salt, if you please, and one cup and one ——" "Saucer," however, had not been provided for by Ollendorff, and Mamy was reduced to pointing with one finger to the article of which she was in quest. No one would have denied the influence of heredity who had witnessed the family meal on the Paris *quatrième* that evening. If Mrs. Clare had not possessed an ancestress of the mysterious race that sends us wandering fortune-tellers and expounders of the occult doctrines of the Mahatmas, such a group would never have been possible. It was, indeed, suggestive of nothing but a band of gipsies gathered round the

pot, caldron, kettle, or camp oven, that from time immemorial has served as the badge and rallying-point of their order. Truca crouched next to her elder sister upon the Chevalier's packing-case. Dick sprawled upon his stomach on the floor, his bread-and-butter spread out upon a piece of newspaper in front of him, while he peeled his hard-boiled egg with his fingers. Mamy was comfortably seated like a Turk on a mattress she shared with her mother, holding a tumbler of beery-looking tea in one hand, and a hunk of elastic Paris bread in the other. All the family were in high spirits. Mamy was inimitable in her rendering of the man concierge; she had caught the exact nasal accent in which he uttered his defiant "Quoi!" She also showed how the portly woman concierge had come out of her den and stood looking after her as she flew up the stairs with the salt and the teacup. Eggy water had been tolerated for the tea-making, but a fresh supply was prepared for washing up. The trouble was to find a cloth suitable for wiping-up purposes. The bundles that were opened in the search, and the contents of trunks that were scattered over the floor thereby, would have stocked a rag and bone shop. The collection of birds' eggs that had been presented to Mamy by one of her juvenile admirers was tossed out among other things. The eggs rolled in all directions on the smooth floor, and a spirited hunt on all fours ensued. Finally, Dick conceived the brilliant idea of prizing open the Chevalier's packing-case, and extracting some strips of the penitentiary calico. But this necessitated a hunt for tools, and a long and reverent examination of the family totem. Though the July evenings are long in Paris, the stars were shining where the last red streak had faded from the sky behind the Luxembourg trees ere the cups were washed and the shake-down prepared for the night. Only a board-ship swing candlestick and candle were available for purposes of illumination, which, as they could not be stuck upon end, were confided to Truca as torchbearer. But the light was wanted in half a dozen different places at once, and Truca grew tired of skipping round with it at every fresh call.

Finally the mattresses received their separate loads.

Dick established his lair in the back-room, placing the table end upwards on its hind-legs before the window, to shut out the horror of the well it looked upon. Mamy and her mother installed themselves in state in the gilt-panelled centre-room, which they pompously christened the reception-room. Truca shared Eila's shake-down in the adjoining chamber, Eila's prospective bedroom. The child lay so still under the sheltering protection of the warm arm that encircled her, that it was only when a long-drawn spontaneous sigh broke the stillness that her sister discovered she was still awake.

"What is the matter, darling? Why don't you sleep?"

"I was listening to that big bell sounding two o'clock in French. Eila," with a wistful intonation, "what do you think we are going to do all day here?"

"Do? In what way do you mean, dearie?"

"Why, like we did at Cowa. I spent so much time with Daisy, you know. Then there used to be such a lot to do among the fowls, there was hardly time for lessons—don't you remember? I used to forget that the minutes were going on always—always. If one begins to think of that, it gets so monotonous. It does frighten me so sometimes to think how God can ever manage to put a stop to the minutes going on. Even *He* can't help it—can *He*?"

"Don't think about it, dear—think we are all together, whatever happens. It is only because you don't understand it here that it seems so dreadful to you; it is as though you tried to make Daisy understand what to-morrow means. And we'll find plenty to do in Paris, never fear! First we must all learn to speak French properly. You and I together—won't it be fun? Then we'll take splendid long walks; and when we get settled, you'll see what good times we'll have. We'll begin to fix things up properly to-morrow."

"And do you think we might go back to Cowa some day? It didn't matter if we didn't know French so well there."

"Of course—why not? Only we must all try to make a little money, and choose a nicer ship than the *Queen of the*

*South*—some great big steamer that would paddle smoothly and quickly all the way out, you know.”

“Yes, that would be nice; and I would write to Mr. Acton to bring Daisy down to the wharf to meet us,” murmured Truca, in convinced and sleepy reassurance.

The little girl slept; but her sister lay awake until the stars faded from the west, and a reflection of dawn in the opposite sky peered coldly through the windows of the *quatrième*. For all they called her the optimist, the moderator, and the rose-coloured spectacles, her heart was heavy within her. The misgivings she had soothed away from Truca's childish breast had not been lifted from her own. It seemed to her that the family had embarked upon unknown seas, without chart or compass to guide them. There was Dick, with his enthusiastic artist-nature, his utter ignorance of the world and its temptations, and his over-weening and blind self-conceit, the result of having lived among isolated women-folk from his boyhood upwards. What pitfalls might he not stumble into unwittingly! Mamy, too, with her vagrant fancy and her unsuspecting innocence—who would mount guard over her here? They were utterly friendless, though their mother believed they had come to carry the world before them. There was not a human being in all this million-thronged city to take them by the hand, and declare them to be worthy of the trust of their fellow-men. As far as Eila could judge from the little glimpse she had obtained that day of the marvellous city of her dreams, she could fully share in Truca's vaguely-expressed apprehensions of the difficulty of making a home in it. It appeared to her that people lived here in public. Had she not seen them, to her great astonishment, eating and drinking at tables on the pavement? Then the perch the family had found, with people located above and below them, separated from them by the mere thickness of a plank, how could such an abode be called a home compared with the acres of solitude and freedom that encircled their real home at Cowa?

A confused vision of the Boulevard St. Michel, sloping widely upwards towards the Observatoire between a hedge

of green trees and towering houses, mingled itself with the memories that approaching sleep was fast effacing from her brain. She had a dream in which she saw the family wandering hatless, with swags on their backs, looking for a camping-place under the trees, and being driven off by long-waisted gendarmes. And when they would have made their escape, she dreamed that they were held fast by the nails in the Chevalier's packing-case. There was no means of release, except by hammering on the case and its contents; and, as it fell to pieces at her feet, behold the fragments were eggshells!

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## CHAPTER XI.

### EILA'S NOTION.

IT is doubtless true, as moralists tell us, that we are wrong to lay upon the impalpable shoulders of Destiny the responsibility of the misfortunes that attend our course. Such misfortunes, they assure us, are almost always the result of our own actions. To be sure, we might retort that our actions are dictated by our natures and temperaments, and might point out that the problem of how far we control these, or are controlled by them in our turn, is of a kind to which no Q. E. D. has so far been attached. But this would only involve us in the toils of the everlasting discussion which, under its theological title of Free Will *versus* Predestination, or its scientific title of Moral Responsibility *versus* Heredity, has divided humanity into two camps from time immemorial. Enough that there is perhaps something to be said in behalf of those who complain of the destiny that presided at their creation or evolution in the same way that there is a plea to be made for the clay that complained to the potter, "Why hast thou made me thus?" There is a gloomy prophecy that it is perhaps better not to think of in this connection (for it seems to foreshadow all the sinister discoveries made by the science of statistics), to the effect that it must needs

be that offences come, though woe be unto him by whom the offence cometh. Now, to ensure the coming of the offences, it must "needs be" that a certain percentage of moral failures should be born into the world to accomplish them, or what would become of the prophecy? Perhaps only severe sectarians would include young Mrs. Frost and her brothers and sisters among the moral failures; but, without going so far as the sectarians, it must be admitted that the Clare family might have been excused for asking, like the potter's clay, why they had been made thus. Even from the little we have seen of them, we must conclude that by birth, by inheritance, and by bringing up, they are only fitted, when brought into contact with the world, to play the part of the earthenware vessel against the vessel of iron. We know which of the two came to grief in their passage down the stream. Eila was, perhaps, the only member of the family who was occasionally troubled by a dim foreboding that she and her belongings had been sent into the world without the proper equipment of offensive and defensive weapons, as necessary to human beings as to animals, if they are not to be trampled under foot in the battle of life. In the beginning of knowledge, especially of self-knowledge, there is wisdom; but Eila's, so far, was only a faint and dawning perception of the truth. Her mistrust of herself and her kin did not teach her how to avert the consequences of past errors. It only inclined her to silence when her mother was prophesying a brilliant future for the family. Mrs. Clare's conviction on this point was indeed so deeply rooted and immovable that it almost attained the elevation of a religious faith, founded, not on external evidences, but on pure inward assurance. She was entirely confident that her children, one and all, would shine some day as stars of the first magnitude. How and when this happy consummation was to be brought about—how Dick was to obtain the Grand Prix de Rome, and Mamy to marry a title—she did not stop to inquire. When the spirit of prophecy was upon her, she would declare that these and similar good things were in store for them: and Mamy and Truca, and even Dick, though they affected to laugh at their mother's predic-

tions, were inclined to think secretly that there might be something in them, after all.

Meanwhile, the difficulty of making both ends meet was becoming more and more evident. Far from meeting, indeed, they seemed to stretch daily farther apart, until Eila, who acted as treasurer, saw with dismay that the family exchequer would be well-nigh empty some weeks before the next slender instalment of her mother's inadequate income should come due.

What now was to be done? Certainly neither mother nor children could be accused of undue extravagance—at least, as regarded their mode of living. If only to maintain their standing in the eyes of the concierge couple, who had both remarked at different times with threatening suavity, “*Faut faire entrer vos meubles—quoi!*” it had been found necessary to purchase some bedsteads, a second-hand table, and some chairs. The table and chairs were placed in the tiny entrance-hall to the reception-room, which was made to serve as a dining-room. The splendour of the reception-room itself was such that no one would have ventured to suggest eating in it. Certainly it was, in familiar parlance, bare as your hand; but so, for the matter of that, were the other rooms, and Eila, who had developed a great notion of order with the decline of the family fortunes, tried to impart an appearance of comfort and respectability to them by keeping them scrupulously clean. She had invested at second-hand in a whole waxing apparatus—a reckless piece of extravagance that she bitterly regretted when funds were lower—and between five and six on summer mornings might be seen, clad in the same airy attire as that in which she had roved about the garden at Cowa, sliding across the reception-room with a heavy brush strapped to her bare white foot, swaying backwards and forwards, as she rubbed it across the newly waxed floor, in imitation of the concierge, whom she had seen carrying on a similar operation on the landing outside. It was her glory to maintain the floor in a condition that rendered it dangerous to walk across it. The active exercise was a temporary relief, though all the time she was brushing her mind was engaged in pro-



jecting imaginary furniture into the apartment—an ottoman here ; a Turkey carpet there ; a cabinet just under the Chevalier's picture, the only adornment the room possessed. Youth attaches little value to its lease of existence. It is not too much to say that Eila would have given a year of her life at these times for each article of imaginary furniture she could have caused to be materialized as she thought of it.

It was not long, however, before the desire for mere furniture gave way to a more imperative need. Eila perceived that at their present rate of living the family would soon be without the means to purchase even the bare necessities of life. Those were terrible moments during which she whisked about in the early morning, as light of foot as she was heavy of heart, wondering how she should conjure the hideous spectre of want that threatened to stalk into the garish apartment uninvited. The reception-room, with its empty parade of blue ceiling, gilt-bordered panels and long mirror, seemed to mock her misery. It was as though she had been condemned to starve in an opera-box. And what could she do ? Where turn for help ? She could not bring herself to warn the others of the impending horror that came nearer daily until she had tried every possible means of averting it. As for Hubert de Merle, she had come to think of him now as a myth. After bringing the family all across the world for the ostensible purpose of finding him, her mother seemed to have lost interest in the search. One or two spasmodic efforts had been made which had resulted in utter failure. The address Mrs. Clare possessed in the Colonies had proved useless. The very street indicated had ceased to exist, and no one in the newly-built quarter had ever heard of the name of Hubert de Merle. The object of their search failing them, what was Eila to do ? She could not put the family upon half rations. Their fare even now was so poor and meagre that it wrung her heart to set them down to it. She wished they would have grumbled at it or at her. After the bounteous *régime* of apple-pudding and Cowa cream to which they had been accustomed, they could not but feel the actual privations sorely ; yet they never complained. There seemed to be a tacit understanding

among them that there was nothing to be done. Eila tried what the severest self-privations could accomplish. She had already foresworn butter and sugar for herself, upon the shallow pretext that she found them too fattening; but she could not find it in her heart to condemn the others to dry bread, when bread-and-butter formed their principal sustenance. A larger proportion of chicory and less milk found their way into the morning coffee. The allowance of broth or meat which came from the *rotisserie* at one o'clock, and which would have been ample for three, was barely enough for five; and when she ventured upon the experiment of leading the whole party to a Bouillon Duval for a Sunday square meal, five francs melted away before they had honestly satisfied their hunger, and it was additional suffering to note the involuntary looks of longing they directed towards the pastrycook's window on their way home. And all the time she felt as regarded their presence in Paris that the question, "What went ye out for to see?" was the one that might most fittingly have been asked them. What had they gained, indeed, excepting hunger, humiliation, and the Tantalus delight of being surrounded by beautiful sights and objects that they had neither the means nor the spirits to enjoy? Dick, it was true, would take out his charcoal and sketching-block, as long as the paper held out; and it was an understood thing that he should attend a studio when funds should be forthcoming. But meantime Eila felt that the aimless life he was leading was bad for him in every sense. When he had carried down the *bac d'ordure* in the morning, and had set it on the pavement outside to await the advent of the scavenger's cart; when he had cleaned the boots, while the blacking lasted, and filled and emptied the family bath, which had been hired at five francs a month in the first burst of their triumph, Dick's household duties were at an end. His time was then his own, and he would ransack the case of books, and toss the contents on the floor, in search of a Shelley or a Shakespeare, which he would read desultorily for an hour; or saunter to the Luxembourg Gallery, or walk to the other side of the river along the Grands Boulevards; or hold forth upon Buddhism,

Socialism, or Nihilism, as the case might be. He was the only one who thought it worth while to lay out a sou upon a *Petit Journal*, as long as the sou was procurable, and who would read it conscientiously from beginning to end in order to obtain an insight into French politics. He found out where the Communists held their meetings at Montmartre, and would come back from a gathering in the Salle Levis glowing with sympathy for Louise Michel. It was always entertaining to hear Dick talk when he was in the vein. He was almost as good a mimic as Mamy, and kept the family amused a whole evening by his rendering of the gestures and declamatory air of a fat and comfortable-looking Communist orator who had demonstrated the absurdity of the popular belief in a God.

"What kind of a god would he be," the Communist had asked derisively, "who would direct the world so clumsily as at present? Why, I who speak to you would make a more intelligent god. In the first place, under my management humanity should always be young; the women should never be older than eighteen, the men than twenty-four."

But Eila had a notion. It came into her head one morning as she was waxing the expanse of floor in front of the long gilt-framed mirror between the windows. The reception-room was still in its primitive condition of glittering barrenness, save for the presence of two battered trunks that served as family wardrobes. Young Mrs. Frost sighed as she looked over its polished, carpetless space. Perhaps she was reflecting that the manner in which she expended her time and energy over this same bare refuge, upon the unlikely hypothesis that it would be converted some day into a habitable home, was typical of the conduct of the family in coming to Paris at all. Had they not also forfeited the substance to run after the shadow? Allured by the glittering attraction of a jewel that existed perhaps only in their mother's imagination, had they not abandoned home and comfort, and the manifold blessings of a secure position?

"We may soon find ourselves literally without bread to

eat," she thought bitterly; "and meanwhile here I am spending my time in polishing these bare boards, and the only end we seem to have served in coming to Paris is to keep this wretched apartment new and shiny for the people who will occupy it when we are turned out."

She threw down her waxing-brush, and sighed heavily once more; but, perceiving a blur upon the gilt-bordered mirror, instinctively took up the *Petit Journal*, upon which she had laid her triangular piece of wax, to rub it off. Every housewife knows that there is nothing better than a newspaper for polishing glass. As she did so the words "Prix de Beauté," printed in large capitals on the page, caught her eye; and, in obedience to an impulse of idle curiosity, she proceeded to read the paragraph beneath them. An amused and half-incredulous smile flitted across her face as she read. The paragraph set forth with elaborate detail that the director of an establishment called the Folies-Fantassin (which Eila did not know to be a kind of music-hall or café concert) made a *bonâ-fide* offer of five thousand francs to the most beautiful woman who should compete for a prize of beauty upon a certain evening on a certain date before a jury of connoisseurs at the aforesaid Folies-Fantassin.

"It can't be true," she thought; but she read the announcement again, nevertheless, and upon a second reading was more than half inclined to believe it. Certainly one must come to Europe to hear of such things as these. How could it be worth anybody's while to give five thousand francs—a whole two hundred pounds—to a person for being merely pretty? What could the director hope to gain when he had paid the money? To be sure, the exhibition in itself might attract people, though even upon that point Eila could not help having her doubts. Possibly the director was himself a very rich man, with a mania for seeing a variety of pretty faces—she had heard of such people—and perhaps this was his way of gratifying his mania. Still, was it not extraordinary that in our sober nineteenth century men should amuse themselves by aping the pastimes of the gods of mythology? Though, for the matter of that,

the gods were more reasonable, since the prize that Paris offered was nothing more than an apple, between which and five thousand francs there was certainly a considerable difference. She wondered what kind of beautiful women would contend for the prize. To compete for it at all would be a tacit avowal that one was very vain; but naturally only completely beautiful creatures would think of competing. Would they be divinely tall and most divinely fair? or, failing this, might passably good-looking young women still have a show? Eila raised her eyes as this reflection occurred to her, and they fell directly with unpremeditation upon her own image in the glass. Quick as thought the idea flashed across her mind:

"Supposing *I* were to try for the prize?"

But almost as quickly it was discarded with an accompanying warm flush of shame. Low as the family had fallen, they had not fallen so low as that. The next step would be to stand at the door of a booth in tights and spangles, or to walk in a procession singing dolorous songs through the streets. What would Reginald say when she told him of her thought? But she would not tell him of it. He would be too grievously hurt. Mechanically Eila took up her waxing-brush again, but before a few more minutes had passed at her work, the idea she had discarded rushed back with new and overwhelming force. An idea once admitted has all the efficacy of the proverbial thin end of the wedge. Before the day was over, the notion of exhibiting herself at the Folies-Fantassin did not seem nearly so awful as at first. Her mother, who had been indisposed for some days, and whose spirits had descended proportionately, was seized with a kind of faint in the afternoon. In the wild panic that ensued, a doctor, recommended by the two concierges, who showed themselves more curious than sympathizing upon the occasion, was sent for. He was a very young man, with the exaggerated dignity of youth; but he unbent in presence of the anguish of this strange-looking family, whose members reminded him vaguely of a group of sculptured castaways. He wrote prescriptions for the patient, whom he declared to be attacked by a kind of "grippe," a name

that had the effect of immeasurably increasing the terror of the others; and, with unconscious irony, insisted that, so soon as the fever had left her, she should be given "*surtout des choses nourissantes*," and he emphasized the *nourissantes* in a manner that recalled visions of Sunday sirloins and bowls of Cowa cream to the family, and that increased a thousandfold the remorseful misery that possessed our heroine's soul.

How cruel and heedless she had been! How could she ever forgive herself? She had allowed her mother to share in all the wants and privations to which they had been of necessity subjected, and the awful consequences lay at her door alone. She had foreseen that the money could not hold out in any case, but had thought that, by reckless parsimony, it might yet be possible to avoid making debts they could never hope to pay. She had been most awfully penny wise and pound foolish. Nay, if it had been only a matter of pounds, it would not have mattered, though, like Marjory Daw, she had had to sell her bed and lie upon straw; but it was a matter of health, of life itself, perhaps, to the one being for whom she and her brothers and sisters would have laid down their young lives unflinchingly. Mrs. Clare's children, indeed, could criticise their mother's conduct freely, they could dispute her views, they could feel she had ruined their prospects; but continue to live without her in this world they could not. The very expression of the doctor as he felt her pulse had made them sick with terror. Moreover, without any intention on her part, Mrs. Clare unwittingly intensified their alarm by her manner of behaving under the affliction. She had one of those instinctively dramatic natures whose very identity seems to disappear in illness, by reason of the tragic aspect their owners unconsciously assume. The moods of most of us are subject to the vacillations that we call familiarly "ups and downs," but Mrs. Clare's "ups" went to impossible heights, and her "downs" descended to unfathomable depths. When her children saw her extended on her bed, with the dark flush of fever on her cheeks, and a wild, half-resentful light in her eyes, they were paralyzed with fear. All but Eila seemed

to lose their heads completely, and even to her the vision of the octagonal bottle recurred more than once with a deadly and horrible fascination. She thought of it that night as she sat by her mother's pillow, after sending the others to bed, and listened despairingly to her incoherent mutterings and fevered breathings.

"You must make the Chevalier carry his sword unsheathed when he takes you to dine at the Elysée," Mrs. Clare said. "Mind he doesn't forget the sword; and ask the President from me why they don't have an alabaster crematorium built. How does he suppose our spiritual essences are going to be liberated, if he shuts us up in coffins? Tell him it wouldn't cost any more; and we're going to be rich—rich."

Eila pressed her palms against her temples distractedly, as she heard her mother's ravings. The old sensations of anguish and terror that she had experienced a few years back seemed to leap up in her again. She had thought them dead and forgotten, and here they were assailing her with new vigour. It was as though a nerve that had been seared by a red-hot iron had awakened unexpectedly to life. Yet it was incumbent upon her at all costs to maintain her outward calm. She felt that if she were to give way now, it would indeed be the end of all things for the family. Her sister, for one, was not to be depended upon. There are natures that glow like molten metal in the furnace of affliction; others, less strong, cannot hold together under the fiery ordeal. Trouble and terror seemed to have demoralized Mamy. She could not look beyond the present, or act upon the advice of the Sunday-school refrain she had so often chanted over the Cowa hills, to wait till the clouds rolled by. Age is apt to wonder that youth should allow itself to be so completely cast down by the troubles that beset it. "As if," says Age, "youth were not compensation enough in itself, since in youth all things are possible, even to the striking of new roots into new soils, and the sowing of a fresh harvest of loves, of joys, and of heart-interests, in the place of those we have lost. But this is the argument of mature years; for youth does not foresee the inevitable appeasement

that Time will bring, nor comprehend that his scythe has a blunt as well as a keen edge, and has as much power to heal as to wound. Moreover, in youth our feelings are all at their keenest. We extract from joy and grief alike the very fullest flavour they can yield us; and though in later years we know that the separation and bereavements which befall us are absolute and final, we yet take them more calmly than of yore, for the reason that we have lost the faculty of feeling the intense and heart-wringing anguish that moved us before. Perhaps the knowledge that it will all be the same, not a hundred years hence, as we are told in youth, but in a very few years, and that these years will rush like all things on their downward course, with an added momentum to the end, may help to render us philosophical, not to say stolid. Or perhaps it is only that our feelings, like rubber bands that have been long in use, have lost their early power of tension. Whatever may be the cause, grief, as a rule (for to every rule there are exceptions), is intenser in early than in advanced years, and this in spite of the extra elasticity of youth. Even to enjoin it to look ahead is oft-times but a vain consolation, since the prospect of living an indefinite number of years in a world where we have already suffered so much seems to increase rather than diminish the burden of our affliction.

While Mamy gave herself up to an abandonment of despair, Eila set herself to think what were best to be done in the pass to which they had now arrived. She saw no help either at hand or from afar. Willie could hardly be expected to do more than keep body and soul together in London, and unless their mother should grow so much worse as to necessitate their sending for him (how Eila shuddered at the thought!), it would be cruel to tell him of their dire need. There was Reginald, certainly; and he would sell the coat from his back to help them; but Reginald, for all his goodwill, was a poor man, with a paralyzed mother depending upon him. If the worst came to the worst, and they were threatened with expulsion—if it came to their following their mother upon a stretcher to the hospital, and having to beg a night's shelter for themselves in a refuge, she would pawn or sell the



Chevalier, and telegraph as a last resource to Hobart. But would it not be better in the first place to try and earn money legitimately by seizing the present opportunity? There was nothing, she told herself, she would not do to save her mother and brother and sisters, even to selling herself body and soul, like the people she had read of in books. The only question was how she should set about it. She had but vague notions of the manner in which people earned money by selling themselves. In books the heroine threw a shawl over her head, and went out with a hectic flush on her cheeks and a feverish light in her eyes, returning in the dawn with her pockets full of gold. But to whom did she address herself for the gold? and would not one die of shame if the first person addressed should drive one contemptuously away? Eila felt drearily resentful towards Fate as she compared her lot with that of other women. If she had been given at least some means of making money by honest labour! But there was nothing she could do. She was a poor hand with her needle. She could neither draw, nor sing, nor play the piano. She could not keep accounts; she might, indeed, have undertaken the care of young children, or given lessons in English, though even in this respect she had neither system nor method. But how could she help her family upon the wretched pittance either of these callings would bring? "I am only a cumberer of the ground," she thought bitterly; yet she had all the time a vague consciousness of possessing certain qualities which, albeit they were not marketable like accomplishments, had yet a certain value of their own. She had youth and health, a beautiful body, quick sympathies, an impressionable mind, and a warm heart. If she could only find an employment where such qualities as these might be turned to account! Had she not heard that models were well paid by the artists who drew from them? If the Folies-Fantassin venture failed, if some poor second or third prize should be yet beyond her grasp, she might turn model as a last expedient, and so tide the family over the evil days that had befallen them. Wild ideas of going into the street and studying the faces that passed her until she found one that looked kind and sym-

pathizing enough to be trusted with her story next occurred to her. Tears of pity for her mother and Truca welled into her eyes as she reviewed the position. By-and-by she crept out upon the balcony again, and felt the cool night wind blow across her wet cheeks. It was one in the morning, and the city was bathed in the balmy light of a golden autumn moon. Eila could distinguish the mighty dome of the Pantheon a little farther down, duskily defined against the starless night sky. Farther still the airy spire of the beautiful Sainte Chapelle pierced the soft gloom; one by one the separate monuments she had learned to recognise shaped themselves before her gaze in gray but separate distinctness. She could even see where the river-lights twinkled at long intervals that marked the bridges of the Seine. How vast and solemn the wondrous city looked at this tranquil hour of the night, and how tiny a fraction of it she and her belongings represented, camped down in their bare rooms in the tawdry building behind her! If they should all be swept away to-night, not a single eye would grow dim, not a tear would be shed by any one of the unknown millions of fellow creatures around them. At most the milk-woman and the *auvergnat* who brought the braise, from both of whom she had obtained a fortnight's credit, would feel justifiably indignant at having been cheated of their due. To arouse friendly sympathy among total strangers, it was evident that money was the first requisite. They must pay their way before they could hope to make friends; and they had barely sufficient to keep a roof, to say nothing of a ceiling, over their heads. Their mother's illness would exhaust the last penny, and more would not be forthcoming for a long time to come.

Some belated students went past at this moment with unsteady step, and seeing the dark figure standing in the moonlit balcony, perched midway between earth and heaven, like a sculptured saint enshrined in a niche between the flamboyant arches of some ancient Gothic cathedral, took off their hats and sang, "Le voilà! Nicholas! Ah! ah! ah!" in a mocking chorus. Eila retreated hastily into the shadow until they had gone by. Looking despairingly

across the dark expanse of the far-stretching Paris roofs, she recalled similar nights at Cowa, when she had stood under the creeper-wreathed frame of the veranda in their dear despised colonial home; and surely no Peri lamenting her exile from Paradise could have felt more bitter regret at her banishment from that peaceful haven. But it would be unjust to suppose that it was the hardness of her own individual lot that moved her. All such egoistic regrets were merged into passionate sympathy for the lot of the others. It had been the height of happiness in her younger days to stand treat for her little brothers and sisters. She loved to see them eat their fill; to give them a pleasure and to see them enjoy it was the keenest delight she knew. And now pitiless Destiny was constraining her to deny them the satisfaction of their very hunger and thirst. As long as boiled beef from the *rôtisserie*, and bread and tea (of which latter they had brought a supply from Tasmania) were forthcoming, they could do without luxuries. But even this poor fare had been unduly cut down to-day. Chicken broth would be needed for the invalid, and meanwhile cough-mixtures and other medicaments, to say nothing of lemons and barley-water, were immediate requirements.

How often Eila went backwards and forwards between the balcony and her mother's bed that night she could not have told. Four o'clock sounded from the distant Pantheon, and the great and small clocks of churches and public buildings boomed and rang the same hour in a confused and irregular chorus. The air was growing chiller; behind the trees of the Luxembourg Gardens the sky held a far promise of dawn in its ash-coloured expanse. Eila felt that her hands were clammy, and her hair dank with the dews of night. A spasm of self-reproach seized her as she hurried back into her mother's room. What if she should have been courting the advance of the same wearisome malady as had laid her mother low? Upon her health and courage the very lives of the others seemed to depend, though, for the matter of that, what were their lives worth to them under present circumstances?

Mrs. Clare, however, was still sleeping, and Eila crept

softly into the reception-room, where Mamy lay asleep face downwards on her mattress, and took the *Petit Journal* from the cupboard into which she had thrust it. It was growing light enough now to read without the aid of a candle. She took it to the window and glanced over the "Faits Divers," wherein a host of daily tragedies are laconically recorded; among them, a short paragraph entitled "Les Drames de la Misère" described the suicide by charcoal, after the approved Paris fashion, of a mother and her four children.

"Why them and not us?" reflected Eila, shuddering.

And suddenly she recalled Mamy's childish wish, that the whole family could ascend to heaven altogether upon the same fiery car, or if not to heaven, at least to rest and forgetfulness. To forgetfulness! To the "sleep eternal" in an eternal night, of which Swinburne had sung. If it had been in her power to procure instant annihilation at this moment for herself and those she loved, to blot them out of existence as completely as though they had never had part nor lot in it, Eila would not have hesitated. Perhaps the Buddhists were right, after all, in regarding life as an opportunity afforded them for ridding themselves of the nightmare of existence, and who anticipated and thus averted the worst of the horrors life had to offer. And yet—and yet—when one was young and strong and comely, when the world had such a marvellous store of interest and delight to offer to brain and heart and senses, it was hard that, for want of a few round bits of metal, existence should be nothing but a torture-hole of Tantalus! Surely there must be some place left that she and her belongings could still fill in the world.

It was curious that in the present crisis Eila did not think of consulting her brother. That Dick would have thrown himself heart and soul into any project she might devise for their rescue was certain, but she doubted his capacity for being of use; and she could not bring herself to tell him that the family was on the brink of starvation until she had made a last desperate effort to save them.

From the "Drames de la Misère" she turned once more to the "Prix de Beauté," and this time she read the para-

graph carefully, weighing every word. She smiled ironically as she read that only *les demoiselles honorables* were invited to take part in the exhibition. It was furthermore declared that no favour would be shown, that the strictest impartiality would be observed in awarding the prizes, and that beauty pure and simple, beauty alone, would gain the suffrages. A second prize of two thousand francs was to be awarded to the second on the list, and the director declared his willingness to receive the applications of all the *belles dames* who should present themselves between ten and twelve in the morning at the Folies-Fantassin within a specified date. The list would be closed next day. When Eila came to the end of the paragraph, her mind was made up. The pallor of a great resolution blanched her cheeks as she laid the paper down. She would make her application next day at the eleventh hour. She would brave all the consequences: the publicity, the notoriety, the shame, the insolent looks of the men who would pass her "points" under review; the insults of the crowd, who would have purchased the right of insulting her. She would thankfully take her seat, if need be, among the painted queens of fairs and casinos, and bare her neck and arms for the ribald appreciation of her judges. And she would have room for no other feeling than a prayer uttered from the depth of her heart that she might find favour in their eyes, and that they might award her at least the two-thousand-franc prize which was to save her family from starving. The five-thousand-franc prize was certainly beyond her reach. Whatever might be thought of the plan, it was preferable to seeing Truca and the rest gasp out their strong young lives amid hideous charcoal fumes.

Young Mrs. Frost's next operation was to walk softly in the growing dawn to the gilt-edged mirror, and to look at herself therein with intent and severe scrutiny. I think she was reassured by the reflection that met her gaze. A night-watch, with an accompaniment of tear-shedding, is not a becoming process; but Eila's beauty was proof against more than this. The mental suffering she had endured had had no other apparent effect than that of darkening her eyes

strangely. They seemed to shine out of her face, which was as white as a Pierrot's with an almost disquieting lustre. There was not the faintest trace of a line or a seam to be seen in the colourless face; hardly the vaguest indication of a crease in the round, sculptured throat. The setting of low-growing hair framed her forehead and cheeks with dark tendrils, as fine and soft as though they had been painted against the flesh. Not all the threadbare shabbiness of the old jacket and skirt she had thrown on over her nightdress could conceal the beautiful proportions of her form, nor disguise the firm roundness of her arms and bust; it could not even destroy the statuesque line from the hip downwards, that Greek sculptors have defined so perfectly in the marble effigies they have bequeathed us of their draped goddesses. Eila turned away, nevertheless, from her inspection in the glass with a sigh; but a sigh may mean many things. For one thing, she reflected that she had no dress in which to appear upon the scene. Perhaps the director of the Folies-Fantassin could tell her where to hire one. It mattered so little what she put on, as long as she gained a prize. Perhaps the less she wore the better. When Virginia in the romance refused to disrobe on the sinking vessel, and to suffer herself to be carried minus her clothes through the waves, she had no starving brothers and sisters whose lives depended upon her own. She was haunted by no visions of a home besieged by the grim spectre of Want. She might throw away her own life in deference to an artificiality of civilization; she would not, surely, have thrown away the dear lives that depended upon hers.

Eila felt almost relieved now that her resolution was finally taken. She intended to keep her plan a secret from the others. She even cherished the hope that she might so manage matters that they would never know the truth. The very next day she would call upon the director of the Folies, and if he held out a reasonable hope of success, she would feel herself justified in selling or pawning the few little personal belongings that were still hers, and spending the money thus procured in keeping the household together until the issue of the contest for the "Prix de Beauté" should be decided.

## CHAPTER XII.

## EILA'S NOTION TAKES SHAPE.

ALMOST everyone has experienced the strange fact that trivial words and unimportant scenes will engrave themselves enduringly in the memory, while golden maxims and spectacles of grave import will leave but shadowy impressions in their wake. It is in vain that we attempt to explain this humiliating circumstance. The explanation least mortifying to our vanity is that, when the meaningless joke or trivial occurrence inscribed itself so indelibly in our minds, our brains chanced to be in a peculiarly receptive condition, so that, like highly-sensitive plates, they retained whatsoever was recorded on them. We will not admit that foolish and *risqué* refrains could appeal more strongly to our recollection than weighty and solemn discourses; but we are fain to wish sometimes that the discourses could have found our brains in the same condition of supersensitiveness as enabled us to retain the refrains.

When Eila took her long drive on the top of the Clichy-Odéon omnibus in search of the beauty-hunting director of the Folies-Fantassin, the Paris that lay about her feet was the normal workaday Paris with which she was now familiar. Even had it been otherwise, her mind should have been too absorbed by the weighty matters that filled it—her mother's illness, the wretched condition of the family, and her own desperate resolution—to allow of her noticing what passed in the outward world. Yet it was a remarkable fact that her absorption seemed rather to increase than to diminish the acuteness of her vision. It was as though the tension of her mind had affected all her senses, and had strained them, so to speak, to concert-pitch. For ever after the recollection of this drive was photographed on her brain with all its minutest circumstances—photographed, moreover, according to latest discoveries, in all the vivid colours that the reality had worn. Her eyes seemed to embrace in one sweep the pale autumn sky overhead, the drooping leaves that clung weakly to the branches on the boulevard trees, the

Broddingnagian gilt letters that adorned the fronts of the endlessly tall houses, the glimpses of indoor life in the entresols with which she was now at a level upon her perch, the sweeping Seine, with its changing patches of light and shade, the bright crowd in the streets below—rich and poor, busy and idle, virtuous and vicious, fat and lean—all so much alike in their outward aspect of trimness and neatness. A double train of thought was coursing through her mind as she watched the scene. While her eyes were taking it all in, her thoughts were busy with the home she had left. Her mother had seemed inclined to doze, and might safely be left to Mamy's care. Mamy herself, upon whom the least ray of hope acted as a charm, had been up betimes to help in the tidying-up. This was a process soon accomplished where there were literally but a few sticks of furniture to tidy. She had also run down before seven in the morning with the *bac d'ordure* rather than allow Dick, who was still asleep, to be awakened to perform the operation. Two students from the École de Médecine had turned round to stare in astonished admiration at the vision of the white-throated, sunny-haired maiden setting down her scavenger's burden upon the pavement. Next Dick, after he had devoured half the spiral loaf and a bowl of chicory coffee of Eila's preparing, had been sent off to a co-operative chemist's where a reduction was made upon all the drugs. Eila herself had taken advantage of his absence to prepare for her expedition, and Mamy had been not a little surprised at the time she bestowed upon her preparations. Her surprise was still greater as Eila emerged from her room dressed in her best, looking radiantly handsome in her shiny black alpaca and her little Marie Stuart bonnet, the latter covered by a flimsy transparency of gauze, through which her dark eyes and virginal complexion looked unutterably soft. She had unearthed from the depths of one of the battered trunks a small square of Maltese lace, a relic of better days, which encircled her throat of marble. Mamy did not dissimulate her astonishment as she noted the transformation in her sister's appearance.

"What are you dressed up to the nines like that for?"



she asked in discontented tones, in which a certain admiration was, however, discernible.

"The only decent rig I have, dear," replied Eila, apologetically. "One mustn't cry misery when one is in search of work, you know."

"You in search of work!" echoed Mamy derisively. "People will be more likely to think they've got to bow you out to your carriage! I should never believe you wanted work if you came to me like that; I should think you were joking. No one will venture to offer you work, you'll see."

"What! not if I asked for it? You may be sure they will. Why shouldn't they?"

"Why shouldn't they?" echoed Mamy. "Just look at yourself in the glass! You might be a princess in disguise. One can't help looking grand when one is so handsome, I suppose."

"Do you really think I look handsome this morning, Mamy dear?" Eila asked, with an eagerly appealing air.

Mamy shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"You can't think how cross you make me feel! You know you're frightfully good-looking. What's the use of talking about it? What good is it here, excepting to make people stare at you and follow you about in the street?"

To this objection, however, Eila did not reply. She was drawing on the pair of kid gloves that had been destined for her visit to her cousin. Latterly she had foregone gloves altogether, or concealed her hands out of doors in an old muff that had reached its limit of perennial shabbiness several years ago.

"You'll bring something in with you for dinner, anyhow," said Mamy anxiously, as she followed her sister to the landing.

Eila nodded, and ran lightly down the long uncarpeted flight of stairs. The man-concierge, who was waxing the landing of the *première*, made way for her surlily as she passed. He was too much of a Frenchman to withhold his staring tribute of admiration as she flitted by; but, as he slid his foot backwards and forwards over the boards, a muttered "'Cré-nom" betrayed the perplexity of his mind. In-

deed, the family from *outrémer*, on the *quatrième*, was the occasion of chronic bewilderment to the concierge pair. Inmates such as these were a new and unexplained fact in their experience. Not only had they no furniture to speak of, which was a suspicious feature in itself, but they had no apparent calling or occupation. That they were miserably poor was certain; yet they did nothing, and mother and daughters were obviously without an *amant*. Anything so hopelessly unpractical, so utterly irreconcilable with the dictates of the most elementary intelligence, had never been witnessed during all the concierge's term of office. He had endeavoured to make something of the letters from Australia that it occasionally behoved him to carry to the *quatrième*, and of which he had begged the stamps; but here, too, his efforts had proved unavailing. He would have set the family down as Nihilists had such a suspicion been compatible with their evident ignorance of even the names of those who held the reins of power in France, and with the generally "gullible" and innocent air that characterized them.

Eila meanwhile was looking down into the Paris streets from her elevated seat on the top of the omnibus. All her life long she would remember the aspect of the river as she saw it dancing beneath her while she crossed the bridge, with the autumn sun pricking it into sparkles, and the trail of the steamers scoring its silver-gray surface with undulating bands. Clattering across the Place du Carrousel, the heavy vehicle rolled beneath the narrow Louvre archway, and came to a standstill near the Palais Royal before taking a fresh freight of passengers for Clichy; then up the busy Rue de Richelieu, with its old-world air and great library, where students bury themselves in past ages in the heart of modern Paris, and thence into the seething life of the Grands Boulevards, framed in an indistinct setting of pale, gold-broidered façades and tremulous yellow-green leaves. Here Eila left the omnibus, and set herself to walk bravely through unknown streets to the Folies-Fantassin. She had enough of the Marie Bashkirtseff element in her nature to have felt excited and elated under other circumstances at the evident admiration she aroused on her passage. Now she only valued

it as an encouragement to carry out the thing she had undertaken. She was obliged to retrace her steps more than once before she found the building, for the streets were tortuous, and she was diffident of asking her way. She found it at last—a leprous-hued edifice, with a side-entrance that led into a dark, descending passage. The front-doors appeared to be closed, and she was hesitating whether to penetrate into the passage by the side-entrance, or to knock boldly at the front-door, when a middle-aged gentleman of large girth, with very prominent eyes, and the kind of fat French face she had so often seen caricatured in *Punch*, came through the side-entrance smoking a cigar. “Gentleman,” she would have called him, in deference to his clothes, which had an air of premeditated smartness, though it flashed across her mind that the French title of *Monsieur*, which is of almost universal application, would have described him more correctly. She had lived in Paris just long enough to comprehend that it is possible for a *monsieur* to be a gentleman, but just as likely that he may be the reverse. An *individu*, on the other hand, can hardly fail to be anything but a doubtful, ill-dressed personage.

The *monsieur* she encountered to-day started back as he came suddenly face to face with her, and said in perfectly audible tones :

“Bonté du ciel ! quelle jolie fille !”

But her sense of the exceeding gravity of her mission prevented her from being disconcerted by the compliment. She hardly noticed it, in fact ; only her cheeks grew visibly paler, and her lips quivered as she inquired timidly in her best French whether it was here that she might expect to find the director of the *Folies-Fantassin*.

“Mais c’est moi, mademoiselle !” replied her new acquaintance, with a delighted bow. “Venez donc, je vous ferai inscrire sur l’instant.”

Eila followed him down the dark passage, with a trepidation tempered by a general feeling of unreality, to a littered room, looking out upon one of those foul, damp, dark, and contracted stone spaces that are assumed to be yards in Paris. The office seemed, however, only to form part of

a wing attached to the main building, which apparently stretched in its turn a long way back until it culminated in a photographer's studio perched upon so elevated a house-top that it made the neck as well as the eye ache to look up at it. Eila felt her heart flutter like a frightened bird as she took the seat the director pointed out to her. Though he had a second-rate theatrical cast of face, which made her think vaguely of circus-riders and organ-grinders, and especially of a certain brigand hero she had seen long ago on the Hobart stage, and whom she had passionately worshipped in her imagination throughout an entire evening, there yet seemed to her to be something in it that might be appealed to. His eyes, it was true, goggled undisguised admiration of her charms, but there was nothing deliberately insulting in their expression. On the contrary, there was a certain comic stupefaction in their regard, as though they had been saying: "*Que diable vient-elle faire dans cette galère!*"

She was spared the embarrassment of explaining her mission, for the director seemed to know it intuitively, and she was innocently struck by what she regarded as evidence of great tact and discrimination on his part. If he had not guessed why she had come, it seemed to her that she would never have found the courage to tell him. She did try, however, to explain that it was the need of money that had driven her to take such a step, whereat he looked at her again with an air of half-incredulous, half-mocking perplexity that might have been interpreted in many different ways. As she said nothing, but only blushed under the look, he shrugged his fat shoulders, as though to imply that he gave up trying to solve the mystery for the present. Eila gave herself the name of Clara Rose, of which she had thought in the night, but admitted that it was an assumed one. The director seemed to hesitate between his desire to question her farther and the necessity for keeping an engagement. He pulled out his watch, and uttered an involuntary "*Diable!*" as he rose from his chair. But the object of young Mrs. Frost's visit had been fulfilled. The last step had been taken. The director had even given her the address of the theatrical costumier who would provide

her the costume she was to wear. He had hurriedly jotted down the items of it as he scanned her person. She was also directed to return the morning before the exhibition, in order that she might be shown the place she would have to occupy on the stage. The whole affair had been so easily and rapidly arranged, and the director seemed to look upon it as so normal and practical a proceeding, that Eila felt half reassured as she turned away from him on her homeward way, after he had ushered her through the dark passage to the street. There was yet a little time to spare before she would be expected home, and she availed herself of it to go once more to the address her mother had brought from Hobart, and to see whether she might discover some news of her cousin. It seemed a forlorn hope, but this time she was more successful, though the news she obtained filled her with despair. She heard that a Monsieur Hubert de Merle had actually occupied an apartment hereabouts before the street was changed many years ago. It was before the Franco-Prussian War. Monsieur de Merle was supposed to have had friends among the Communists, and perhaps he had thought it prudent to leave France. Some exiles who returned from New Caledonia had reported that he had become a "squatter" in Australia. In Australia! Eila's voice faltered as she thanked the man who gave her this explanation. Nothing more definite was to be obtained, and she trudged home (three sous saved counted for something) with a depressing sense that the family migration had been even a greater act of folly than she had supposed. Not only had they pursued an ignis fatuus across the world, but they had left the solid substance behind them in a double sense.

Hubert had been, in all probability, within a very few days of them, while they had been making the most unheard-of sacrifices to come to Europe in search of him. Perhaps he had been living for years in their very neighbourhood, for Australians and Tasmanians are neighbours. Nay, he might even have come to Hobart itself among the army of summer strangers, without their knowing anything about it.

They could have sympathized with his life and his work, for doubtless he spoke the same language as themselves, and got at the rights of the wonderful ruby story that concerned them. Pondering over these things, Eila returned home, and, to the eager questions poured forth by Mamy as she opened the door, replied gravely that she had put in a claim for a kind of work she thought she might be capable of undertaking, but that it was useless to question her further, as she had made up her mind to say nothing until the matter was decided.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### BOHEMIA'S VISITORS.

ABOUT ten days later, as Eila was returning along the old Rue St. Jacques from a secret expedition to the theatrical costumier, who was arranging her a kind of Bacchante costume, taken from a mythological ballet, a very different aspect of Paris was greeting the eyes of Lucy Warden and her brother, standing in one of the balconies in front of an upper room of the Hôtel Continental, overlooking the garden of the Tuileries. The branches of the famous elms over the way were only sprinkled now with limp leaves, that the faintest breeze brought fluttering down. The air was just a little chill, for the summer heats had long been cooled by the frigid nights of autumn, and Lucy had thrown a seal-skin tippet, as new and sleek and rich-looking as everything else she possessed, over her not too plump shoulders. Lucy was not what the French expressively call *étouffée* in a fleshly sense. On the other hand, she heaped upon her spare little person stuffs both rich and rare, and it was a belief in the family that you might stick a pin into any part of Lucy's attire, when she was "dressed for the day," with the sole exception of her waistband, without the risk of encountering her flesh.

Mrs. Warden, with her son and daughter, had arrived in

Paris only the day before, and Sydney had already inscribed their names in the hotel-book, with a proud flourish of Black Swan Station, Victoria, and Emu Villa, Tasmania, appended to them. He had consulted the list of theatres posted up for the benefit of inmates, and had taken his mother and sister to see Sarah Bernhardt in "La Tosca." The young people had been immensely impressed, and their mother a trifle bewildered. Indeed, Mrs. Warden found it necessary to remind herself more than once during the course of the drama that it was really the thing, after all, to go and admire Sarah Bernhardt in this particular piece. Otherwise, there were details in it she would rather, for her own part, have avoided witnessing. To-day their time was all their own, and Mrs. Warden was casting about for the best means of improving the shining hours of the bright Paris afternoon, and moving rather laboriously about the charming room she shared with her daughter, when Lucy and her brother discussed their plans outside.

"How pretty it is over there, to be sure!" said Lucy reflectively. "Do look at the ribands of that woman with the children! A nurse, I suppose. They almost sweep the ground! And what smart gold pins she has in her cap, too!"

"Just look how that fellow holds his reins," said Sydney, for whom the aspect of the riders and their mounts on the way to the Bois was more interesting than the pins and ribands of the *nounous*. "Did you ever see such a duffer?"

"He has a nice horse, though," observed Lucy doubtfully. "By-the-by, Sydney, if we go and see the Clares to-day, will you come with us? We have their address, you know."

"Why? Did mother say she was going?" asked Sydney, after a pause.

His tone sounded more sulky than encouraging, for his mother's attitude towards his friends had been long a sore point with the young man. He knew that she looked upon it as a condescension to visit them, and was prepared to resent her patronage on his own account as well as on theirs.

"She didn't exactly *say* she was going," Lucy replied

guardedly; "but I know she will if I ask her. After all, Sydney"—this after a moment's reflection—"you must see that neither Mrs. Clare nor young Mrs. Frost is altogether mother's sort."

"They're not always chattering about the fashions, if you mean that," said Sydney warmly. He did not reply, "I never said they were," for Lucy's words showed that she had divined to a certain extent what was passing in his mind.

"No, I don't mean that," said Lucy calmly. Her face, however, was a trifle suffused; Sydney's contemptuous utterance of the word "fashions" seemed like a reflection upon her mother and herself. "I mean something quite different, though, as far as that goes, it is silly to be always attacking the fashion as you do. I am sure there are heaps of clever, fashionable people in the world, whatever you may say, just as there are stupid unfashionable ones. I wasn't thinking about the Clares in that way, nor about the peculiar style in which they dress. If *that* were all, one would not mind so much——"

"If what were all?" interrupted Sydney gruffly. "I don't know what on earth you're talking about!"

"If their being outwardly peculiar were all," replied Lucy frostily, "one would not mind so much, though they are unlike everybody else one knows. But they have such peculiar ideas. They scoff at religion, for one thing; still, I suppose they are to be pitied, for they really are an unfortunate family. There's young Mrs. Frost, for instance; if she hadn't married in such a hurry, she might really have made a good match in the end. People think her very good-looking, and she *is* pretty, in a way, if she were only a little better dressed; and Mamy, too. I can't think how she could be so silly as to behave as she did in Hobart."

Sydney pulled his travelling-cap—he had set it on his head as he came out upon the balcony—farther over his forehead.

"How did she behave?" he said, with studied indifference, but quailing inwardly.

He had looked away from his sister as he asked the question, and Lucy affected to yawn as she replied:



"Why, everyone knows she was an outrageous little flirt. She was going the right way to ruin all her chances of getting settled in life."

"Getting a husband, you mean!" said her brother shortly. "I don't suppose she'd got to the end of her chances, as you call it, seeing she was only seventeen last March."

"How well you know her age for a stranger!" observed Lucy, with meaning. She had coloured a little at Sydney's comment; for Lucy was sensitive upon the score of her age, and often secretly regretted that she was not three years her brother's junior instead of his senior. "I know Mamy's only a child, if it comes to that," she continued; "but she was a most precocious little flirt, all the same. Well, I suppose we shall have to go and see them this morning. You got their address from the bank in London, you know. How astonished they will be, to be sure! We are the last people in the world they would think of seeing in Paris."

Sydney would infinitely have preferred calling upon his friends alone. So completely, indeed, did he incorporate himself with them, that he would have liked to send them timely warning of his mother's intended visit. He did not do so; and the consequence was, that a couple of hours later a carriage from the Hôtel Continental drew up before the tall house in the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, and two richly-clad ladies, accompanied by a young man whose morning-suit of finest serge proclaimed him to be dressed by a genuine English tailor—no counterfeit *tailleur Anglais*—inquired of the evil-looking concierge the number of Madame Clare's apartment. Little did the visitors imagine, as they rustled up the stairs, that their visit was equivalent to bringing a week's rent in their pockets, since it had the effect of inducing the concierge to extend to a fortnight the week's credit he had given Eila.

The mid-day meal that day consisted of a franc portion of cabbage-soup and some bread. Ever after Eila trembled to reflect that if Mrs. Warden had arrived just five minutes earlier, she must have seen Dick mounting the stairs with the tin of soup in one hand, and a loaf like a spiral walk-

ing-stick in the other. Fate, however, was kind, for the family were all indoors. Unfortunately, the table in the ante-chamber was laid—that is to say, it was covered with two newspapers in lieu of a cloth, and four coarse soup-plates, into which Eila was about to pour the soup from the saucepan in which she had been heating it over an inadequate fire of braize in the miniature kitchen, when voices and the trailing of silk skirts were distinctly heard upon the landing. A peremptory knock at the door followed, and for one breathless moment the family lost their presence of mind. Eila rushed into the kitchen with her saucepan, and threw off her soiled blue apron. Truca made a bolt into her mother's room, and hid behind the door. Mamy, attired in an old walking-jacket which had shed half its front buttons, whereby a long line of milk-white throat was displayed, advanced boldly to the door. She opened it cautiously, with an air of frightened expectancy, and found herself face to face with Sydney. It was with difficulty that the poor child repressed a cry of emotion. Her very home in Hobart seemed to have walked upstairs in his person. Yet the distance that separated her from him appeared greater than ever, for Mamy had begun to understand that social barriers are more difficult to surmount than geographical ones. But Sydney's face wore the same expression of dog-like devotion as ever. No heed took he of the absence of collar or the lack of buttons on Mamy's jacket. Buttons or no buttons, she was always the one maid in the world for him. His eager grip of her timidly-extended hand almost hurt her fingers, and contrasted oddly with the fashionable hand-shake bestowed by Mrs. Warden's daintily-gloved fingers, and Lucy's conventional kiss; for Lucy had no understanding of kissing, which is a thing that comes naturally, or that never comes at all. And now Eila emerged from the kitchen with a grim determination to keep up appearances in the teeth of everything. She led the party promptly through the dark ante-chamber into the brilliantly bare reception-room, against the walls of which the battered trunks stood in a helpless row, feeling inwardly wrath with Dick for leaving his coat and boots upon the floor.

"You see we are all in confusion," she said apologetically; "but we hope to make this room look pretty by-and-by when we get the furniture in."

"It will look sweet, I am sure!" said Lucy graciously. "I suppose you have only just come here?"

"We have not been here long," said Eila, with a frowning aside in the direction of Mamy, who was just about to say, "Six weeks." "What we most delight in is the view. Go and get some chairs—will you, Dick? You won't mind their being kitchen ones?" with a smile at her visitors; "nothing is in its place yet."

The chairs were brought, and Mrs. Warden and her daughter were ensconced in them at the open window, whence the well-nigh bare Luxembourg trees, brushed with a haze of lilac, were to be seen to the best advantage. Mrs. Warden inquired after each member of the family in turn, and professed herself overcome with sympathy for poor dear Mrs. Clare, whom she would have been so charmed to see. Deeply interested she declared herself, too, in the young people's pursuits. She carried on a conversation with Eila in an under-tone respecting art studies in Paris generally.

"Lucy—dear child!—would so like to improve herself in her flower-painting. She wants me to leave her for a time in Paris with Miss Flyte-Smythe—the Archdeacon's sister, you know. Quite a charming person! I told you about her in Hobart, I believe. It seems they have living models in the studios, after all; and I have heard, though I can't quite believe it, that—they have nothing on. However, Miss Flyte-Smythe is entirely in favour of the Paris method—she attends the best studios, and she is invited to the Embassy, and all; so I suppose it must be the thing, though it sounds very queer. Where does your brother take lessons, may I ask?"

"We are waiting until we are a little more settled to decide," said Eila, with calm assurance. "There is so much to see to and to do just at first—so many new impressions to take in."

"Quite so," rejoined Mrs. Warden blandly; "and when you are settled you will be gathering a little circle of friends

around you. The great thing is to get in with the best people at first. You don't know perhaps that the Tomlinsons and the Miss McCreadys, and quite a number of Australians and Tasmanians, are staying in a pension in the Rue Marbœuf. They have found some delightful society there, and they have most agreeable reunions. One of the gentlemen was secretary to Marshal Bazaine. Then the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. de Lisle are at the same pension—they go to all the receptions at the Embassy, you know. We are to make a party to lunch with them at Robinson's to-morrow. I've never been there, but it seems it is quite the thing to go and take your lunch in a tree. Now, if you and your sister would join us we should be very pleased. Then you must stay and dine with us at the Continental in the evening. Perhaps Marshal Bazaine's secretary will honour us by coming."

Many conflicting thoughts came into Eila's mind before she replied to this invitation. Her first impulse was to denounce herself as an impostor. If the Tomlinsons, the McCreadys, and the Archdeacon's sister—nay, if Mrs. Warden herself—could imagine the dire straits to which the family was reduced; if they could have been told that the very next night she herself was pledged to appear in a Bacchante costume on the stage of a low music-hall to be gazed at by a ribald crowd! If they could have known that she was on the eve of selling herself to gain bread for her family—for, after all, what did the exhibition of her personal graces on a public platform amount to but to selling herself?—where, then, would have been the invitation to Robinson's? Young Mrs. Frost passed through a severe mental ordeal at this moment. Like the peasant in *Æsop's Fables*, she would have liked to blow hot and cold at the same time. It occasioned her the keenest anguish to think of cutting herself adrift from the charmed circle to which Miss Flyte-Smythe and the Archdeacon's sister belonged. On the other hand, how could she sacrifice the only chance that seemed to offer itself of improving the miserable condition of the family? Then, as long as the Wardens took them by the hand, might there not still be a chance for Mamy? If ever her roving

fancy was capable of being fixed, should it not be during the actual crisis, when the mere difficulty of living had been brought home to her in so cruel a fashion? There could be no deceit in accepting the invitation for Mamy, at least, who, indeed, knew nothing of the degradation to which her sister was about to subject herself of her own free will, and who never should know it, if Eila could possibly prevent it.

"It is very good of you," she replied at last to Mrs. Warden in grateful tones. "I can't say how much I should like to go, but I could not feel easy at leaving mother for the present. Mamy, I am sure, will think it a great treat. I will call her in to thank you herself."

She stepped on to the balcony, where Sydney and Mamy were leaning over the railing side by side, with their backs turned to her. She called to them softly, and it rejoiced her heart to see that, as they turned hastily round, there was a startled, almost guilty, expression in the eyes of both, and that their cheeks were unmistakably flushed.

"Mrs. Warden has a treat in store for you, Mamy," she said, in unconsciously elated tones. "She has invited you to go to the Bois with her to-morrow, and to picnic in a tree at Robinson's. Did you ever hear of anything so lovely? And you are to dine with them at the Continental afterwards, she says."

"I can't go," protested Mamy in a vehement undertone; "I've nothing to wear."

"Not go! Nonsense! You *must*, dear," said Eila with insistence. Her tone was playful, but there was a hint of almost threatening urgency in it that did not escape Mamy's attention. "Come and thank Mrs. Warden yourself." Then, as the younger girl pushed irresolute past her, she whispered hurriedly: "You shan't refuse—you mustn't. I'll see that you are decently dressed, I promise; but say *yes*, whatever you do."

And Mamy said "Yes," being conscious all the time of a desire to say "No."

"Then we may look for you at eleven to-morrow, my dear?" said Mrs. Warden amiably, after Mamy had uttered her timid and reluctant acknowledgment of the invitation.

"You haven't seen Robinson's yet, nor we either, I'm ashamed to say. I will send your sister safely back to you to-morrow evening," she added, turning to Eila, "so don't be uneasy if you should not see her till late."

Nothing could have fallen out better. The visitors now took their leave, and Dick conducted them gravely to the very door of their carriage, and put them in with as dignified an air as was compatible with his frayed and collarless Crimean shirt and rough knitted ulster. In returning, he bounded up the staircase four steps at a time, and, whether under the influence of some pent-up feeling it was incumbent on him to work off, or because the visit had produced an emotion not translatable in words, he was no sooner within the shelter of the apartment than he tilted himself on his head like an acrobat near the entrance-door, and tapped his heels against the panels.

"Good gracious, Dick! are you out of your senses?" cried his sister. "What do you do that for?"

"That's how I'm going to receive Marshal Bazaine's secretary," said Dick, bestowing a kick upon the panels.

"Get up, for goodness' sake. How can you be such an idiot?"

"And the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. de Lisle," said Dick, with another tapping of the heels, which caused him, however, this time to lose his balance, and to come down with a full-length flop on the floor.

"Come and take your bouillon," said Eila.

She had donned her kitchen apron again, and was filling the plates with the scalding mess. She found it an economy to serve the soup as hot as possible. It seemed to make it go farther and last longer. A hunk of bread was set by each plate. The family would have liked to make the meal last a long time (though it was certainly an unsatisfactory thing to begin and end with soup), had they not been too hungry to brook delay.

Meantime a savoury sweetbread, browned to perfection, and having an aroma that might have been added to the list of appetizing whiffs that tortured the unhappy Tantalus, was borne past the hungry diners to the invalid's room. As

Eila carried it to her mother's bed and set it before her, Mrs. Clare took up the fork eagerly, then let it drop.

"What good thing have you brought me here, my dear?"

"Sweetbread, mother. The doctor said you might have some."

"I won't touch it unless you tell me what you have had for dinner. What meat did you have?"

"Steak," said her daughter in a low voice. "We've all eaten as much as we can. But you must take this at once. You are not to talk, the doctor says, only to eat and get strong."

And Mrs. Clare did as she was told, and her children forgot that their dinner that day had been but a Barmecides' feast after all in their joy at hearing that mother had eaten nearly every scrap of her sweetbread. The precious morsel that was left would have been given by common accord to Truca, only she could not be persuaded to take it; and it was only when Eila, losing patience, threatened to throw it away altogether, that Dick rushed forward to appropriate it.

Her mother having dined, Eila was free to give all her attention to the important question of Mamy's dress for the morrow. When she had washed the soup-plates, and hung her blue apron in the kitchen, she proceeded to overhaul the trunks, while Mamy stood by her side, lending only a half-hearted acquiescence to the operation.

"You should be so delighted at such a chance," Eila said admonishingly, as she knelt before the trunk in which she hoped to make a find. "I think it was wonderfully kind of Mrs. Warden to ask you. And just look here! Mother's mantle with the beads will be the very thing for you to wear. I don't think Mrs. Warden ever saw her in it. And you can have my Hobart gloves and boots—only do be careful of them this time. And your black merino skirt looks quite decent since we arranged it. The body is all to pieces, but I can lend you my jersey to wear with it."

"But I haven't got a parasol," said Mamy dejectedly.

"No more you have. That's a pity! I never thought of it, either. I would lend you my umbrella, but it's dread-

fully Mrs. Gampish. Never mind ; it's always allowable to forget one's parasol. They may think you left it behind. And, what's more, it's sure to be shady if you lunch in a tree. Let me see what you look like in this mantle. Mother won't mind lending it to you for once."

Eila continued to chatter on while Mamy donned the mantle.

"It's too fine for me," she said, shaking her head, as she tied the string round her supple waist, and turned to admire herself in the long mirror with juvenile curves. "Why are you so set on my going to-morrow, Eila?" she continued. "I shall only be miserably uncomfortable and out of my element all day. What am I to do if the Rawlinsons and McCreadys, and all those people Mrs. Warden talked about, were to ask me about our life in Paris, and offer to come and call upon us?"

"Say you'll let them know as soon as we're settled. We're not obliged to give them an account of what we have for dinner, or how we may choose to live, are we?"

"Of how we're *forced* to live," interrupted Mamy dolefully.

"Only for a little time, dear," said Eila, with well-assumed cheerfulness. "What with mother's illness and our money being delayed, we have had to go through rather a rougher time than we reckoned upon. But it will all come right in the end, you'll see. Only mind you try and have a good time to-morrow for once; and don't go refusing things at dinner when they're handed to you. It's not like being at a Duval to dine at the Continental, you know. All the courses are paid for beforehand, so just make the most of the opportunity."

Mamy shook her head.

"I couldn't," she said vehemently. "I shall be thinking the whole time of all of you at home. If only Dick had been invited too! I shall feel as though every mouthful would choke me."

"Nonsense!" said Eila. "I shall never forgive you, if you don't tell me when you come home that you 'reg'lar enjoyed' your dinner—like the woman we met on the New-



haven steamer. Don't fret about things, either. It's no use; and I suppose it is better to eat one's black bread first, after all."

She sighed, however, as she made the admission, kneeling before the trunk filled with home relics—the flotsam and jetsam of their early Cowa possessions. How foolish they looked as she tumbled them out on the smooth floor! How much money had been wasted in dragging these poor remnants over the world! There was something grotesque as well as pathetic in their aspect. Flounces and soiled artificial flowers from old ball-dresses, broken fans and odd gloves, the remains of a little Neapolitan costume in which Dick had achieved his one social success in his childish days at a juvenile fancy ball. All that the trunk contained would hardly have been worth the trouble of carting it away, yet how many happy associations, how many moments of careless, unconscious joy in living, were bound up with the worthless frippery. Eila bowed her head to prevent her sister from seeing the tears that were welling into her eyes. What demon of folly could have prompted her to advocate the scheme of bringing the family to Europe—she who had always prided herself upon her prudence? Was she not in a measure responsible for reducing her loved ones to beggary?

"I suppose it is better to eat our black bread first," she repeated drearily; "but oh, Mamy, when one thinks what a big white loaf you might have to yourself if you chose, and what slices you could give us all out of it! Did Sydney speak to you again, dear, to-day, on the balcony?"

"He spoke to me, of course," was Mamy's flippant reply. "He said he thought Paris a fine place—much too fine for the little monkeys of men that lived in it."

"Did he? How absurd! But I don't want to know his opinion about Paris. I want to know what he said to you particularly. You know about what——"

Mamy reflected for a moment.

"He said nothing about *that*, and I don't want him to, either."

"Not want him to!" Eila looked up reproachfully.

"It's no use telling me you care about mother and the rest of us, Mamy. If you did, you could not see us brought to such a pass and not be anxious to help us out of it; when it would not cost you more trouble, either, than to raise your little finger."

"It's not the trouble I'd mind," said Mamy gravely, "and you know quite well I would do anything in the world to help mother; but this is different. I don't believe you know how I feel one bit. Supposing *you* were free, would you marry the first person, no matter who, so long as he could give you mouey?"

"No matter whom," said Eila solemnly, though with reference to the sentiment, rather than the grammatical construction of her sister's question, "I would try to make him a good wife. I would do my duty by him; but I would look upon my whole existence as a sacrifice made to the family. I would try to crush down all personal feelings, and to find my happiness in putting poor mother into decent surroundings, and providing for you and the others. When people are as poor as we are, Mamy, as absolutely, abjectly poor, they are forced to sacrifice themselves in some way or other. What are all our lives now but one perpetual strain of self-denial? If, by making no greater sacrifice than the little one of not marrying for love, you could raise yourself and all who are dear to you out of the mire, you should consider yourself a most wonderfully fortunate girl. Look at the thousands and millions of girls whose husbands are chosen for them by their parents. Look at the princesses, who have no voice in the matter at all. In what way would you be worse off than they? and why should you be so selfish as to put your own feelings first, and to consider them so exclusively, when one might almost say that the very lives of the others are in the balance?"

"But it's not myself and my own feelings only that I'm considering," protested Mamy, almost whimpering. "You were always the special pleader, Eila, and I never could make black look white as you can. Still, you ought to understand that I am considering the man I would have to marry quite as much as myself. I couldn't help hating him,

if I didn't marry him for love. It's no use pretending I should make him a good wife, for I shouldn't; I feel it in my heart. I should make him the worst wife in the world. The fonder he was of me, the more I should dislike him."

Eila had already shaken out the folds of the black merino skirt carefully, but some unacknowledged irritation induced by Mamy's words caused her now to shake it again more vigorously. When next she spoke she made a visible effort to control herself.

"How like a romantic little schoolgirl you do talk sometimes! What do you know about the way in which you would feel towards a husband until you try, I should like to know! Nothing would make me believe that you have such a cold, ungrateful nature as you want to make out. Why should you think you would dislike a person all the more for being fond of you? On the contrary, you would be grateful first, and then affection would come, and then love. Besides, when you are a little older, Mamy, you will understand that marrying for love signifies nothing at all. You must know how many cases there are of people who love each other passionately at first, and who quite turn against each other at the end of a few years, or who get tired out of each other's society in the course of time. People can never really tell whether they suit each other or not until they come to live together; and often the very ones who seem the least suited to each other in the beginning hit it the best in the long-run. If your whole heart were set upon another man to whom you were already engaged, I would not advise you as I do; but see how many times you have had fancies for different people already. That shows how little importance you need attach to your feelings. You may believe me that they will never really be fixed for good at all until you are a wife. Then, it is not as though I were asking you to make any pretence, either. If Sydney still wants you to marry him, with the full knowledge that you are not in love with him, it is because he is sure of being able to win your heart in the end."

Mamy had listened somewhat abstractedly to her sister's argument, and her next observation seemed to show that she

had been rather following out a mental speculation of her own than attending to it closely.

"I wonder," she said slowly, finding her words with effort, "whether, if a man persists in wanting a girl to marry him after she has told him she can't care for him, and she married him in the end, whether he or she is the most to blame if they are unhappy afterwards."

"It depends upon how the woman behaves after they are man and wife, I should think," said Eila. "For if she consents to marry him at all, she should at least intend to try and make the best of him. . . . But, talking of Sydney, you used to be rather fond of him at one time, Mamy—don't you remember?"

"When I was quite young, perhaps," said Mamy with a sigh; "but there were other boys I liked better afterwards; and as soon as Sydney wanted me to marry him in earnest, I felt I did not care for him in that way at all. Besides, only think of what Mrs. Warden would say! She would be *horribly* disgusted!"

Mamy emphasized the "horribly" with pathetic earnestness, and Eila paused in smoothing out the pleats of the black merino skirt, while a little flush mounted in her cheeks.

"You are shifting your ground now, Mamy. Mrs. Warden is a worldly woman, but she cares to see her children happy first of all."

"She cares more to have them make grand marriages," interposed Mamy, nodding her head with an air of wisdom; "and, after all, I think I could understand her being a little disgusted, too, at my marrying Sydney. What would he gain in return for giving his heart—to say nothing of his money—but a pauper wife who wouldn't care for him, taken out of a pauper family?"

"He would gain the wife he cares to have, and that is all that really matters," said Eila warmly. "You need not insult us by calling us a pauper family, either, Mamy. We are not paupers as long as we don't ask for charity."

"What else do you want me to marry Sydney for, then?" said Mamy bluntly.

Eila's cheeks glowed a deeper red.

"We won't discuss the matter any more," she answered loftily. "You take everything I say in a wrong sense. If you were Sydney's wife, you would be entitled to a share of all he possesses. There would be no question of charity in that; and the fact of your being rich and having influence would enable you to open all kinds of careers to the others that are hopelessly closed to them now. It would not be charity to have Truca to stay with you sometimes, I suppose? nor to put Dick in the way of earning his bread?"

"It is strange that Mrs. Warden doesn't seem to have any idea that Sydney cares about me," observed Mamy reflectively. She had ignored Eila's indignant refutation of the charge of being a pauper. "As for his marrying me, I don't believe she would let him, if it came to the point."

"She couldn't help herself," cried her sister eagerly. She thought she divined a faint indication of wavering in Mamy's last words. "Sydney has more power than you think. Mrs. Warden only has a part of the revenue of his fortune and Lucy's to spend in her lifetime. She can't really interfere in the marriage of either. I think you are a little unjust to her, too, Mamy. I am sure she would be very fond of you as a daughter-in-law, once there was no help for it. Why should she have come all the way here to-day just to invite you to Robinson's to-morrow?"

"She invited us all. She would leave Paris to-night if she thought such a fearful catastrophe as the one you want to bring about could overtake her. What a cruel way of repaying her, too, it would be! She would be like the engineer 'hoist with his own petard.'"

Mamy was pleased to air this grown-up metaphor, which she had only chanced upon the day before; but Eila was thinking more of what her words implied than her choice of them. If it were really possible for her to bring about what Mamy called the "catastrophe" of her engagement to Sydney Warden, what a joy and triumph it would be! She told herself that she would move heaven and earth to procure so blessed a consummation.

"Though I don't suppose it would be heaven I should

move in the matter," she reflected grimly; "they say marriages are made there, but I am afraid this one would not be recognised. Am I doing wrong, I wonder, in urging the match upon Mamy against her will? I am acting in the full trust that it will be for her ultimate happiness. If we could only see ahead ever such a little way—just far enough to enable us to foresee the result of our actions and combinations before their consequences are quite irretrievable! But what is life, after all, but a groping in the dark? Even the next hour is hidden behind a black veil. I can see no farther now than that we have fallen into a kind of quagmire of discomfort and misery, and that Sydney's arm is stretched forth to pull us out of it. If Mamy were rescued, the rest would be saved too. And what is the sacrifice demanded of her? Only to let herself be loved and adored by a worthy, honourable, pure-minded young fellow, sound in mind and body, who would give her all that makes life worth living. I don't believe there is any sentiment in the world that can make up for the want of a dinner and a bed. What miracle does Mamy expect to happen, I should like to know? Does she think a Prince Charming is going to climb into this miserable apartment on purpose to look for her? There is much more danger, so pretty and young and light-minded as she is, that some handsome adventurer will take her fancy, and make utter shipwreck of her life. Even if we were not as wretched as we are—even if the family had not to be considered at all—I should still consider it my duty to persuade her to listen to reason. Marriage is her only port of refuge—I see that clearly. I should feel her to be safely anchored if she were Sydney Warden's wife."

Thus Eila mused, while apparently engrossed in the arrangement of Mamy's apparel for the morrow. For the latter part of her task, she was amply rewarded by her sister's appearance next morning as she tripped into her mother's room to bestow a good-bye kiss upon the invalid's sallow cheeks before taking herself off for the day.

Wonderful is the elasticity of youth! The morning was soft and balmy; a faint mist rested upon the half-stripped branches of the trees in the Observatoire Gardens, while

the dome of the lofty sky overhead showed a smooth expanse of turquoise blue. There was a promise of an exquisite day in the prospect from the little balcony outside, and Mamy's face was a radiant reflection of the same.

"Will I do in my borrowed plumes?" she called out, in tones of tremulous excitement, as Eila hurried from the kitchen in her blue check apron, carrying the coffee-pot in her hand.

"Do! It is a perfect get-up! It is *épatant*, as the concierge says. You might be a princess. Listen to me, Mamy," solemnly; "you must always wear black when you want to look your best."

"And jingly things," said Mamy, surveying the bead fringe of her mother's mantle with naïve admiration.

"And a little sailor hat like that," continued her sister. "Dick is going to walk with you as far as the Continental. You will go down the Rue de Seine, past the *brocanteur's*, you know."

"I don't want Dick," said Mamy quickly. "I know the way quite well by myself."

"Dick is going with you, all the same." There might be detected occasionally a note of calm decision in Eila's soft tones that spoke of a hidden, inflexible will. "He is putting on his boots. Good-bye, dear;" and she bestowed a warm kiss on Mamy's pouting lips; then, in a hurried whisper: "And have a little pity on us all, pray."

"You haven't any pity on me," protested Mamy, her bright blue eyes suddenly suffused.

It seemed to her that she was like a lamb led to the slaughter; but there was nothing in her air that would have suggested a sacrificial lamb, save the skip of joyous anticipation with which she prepared to descend the staircase in her brother's wake.

In a world where, as Eila had reflected, even the coming hour is hidden behind a black veil, the best philosophy is to make the most of every passing minute. Now, the minutes this morning were fraught for Mamy not only with joyous expectation, but with actual and positive delight. Every step down the Boulevard St. Michel by Dick's

side was a joy in itself; the air was so bright that she could have danced instead of walking. Her insufficient diet had had no other effect, so far, than that of making her feel like a young racehorse in training. Her sedate and seemingly pompous attire formed a quaint contrast to the round and childlike face, fair and delicate as a painted Greuze. To look beyond the next few hours would have been a work of supererogation. Was there not a long drive in the Bois awaiting her, and a lunch in the open air up a tree (was ever such a delightful notion heard of out of Tasmania?), and, superlative treat of all, a dinner at the *table d'hôte* of the Continental? With such a prospect in store, life was indeed a boon, and Paris was the place to enjoy it in.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### EILA PREPARES FOR THE SACRIFICE.

How the long day of Mamy's absence wore away Eila did not rightly know. She was only conscious that there was little repose for her in it, either of body or of mind. While she was carrying on such household duties as could still be performed in a home that was well-nigh stripped of all that rendered it deserving of the name, her thoughts were fixed upon the ordeal that awaited her in the evening. As the afternoon dragged on, she found herself trembling under the influence of a strange feverish excitement that nothing would allay. A sudden spasm of realization of the thing that was to come, such as a criminal condemned to the gallows might experience, overcame her at unexpected moments, when the whole scene of a few hours hence would shape itself vividly before her imagination. The building, the people, and the lights made a horrid impressionist picture that thrust itself on her consciousness by anticipation. She could see herself advancing slowly to her seat upon the stage in her Bacchante dress, her flowing hair crowned with a garland of fabricated wild vine-leaves, the leopard-skin



that encircled her body partly opened to display her shapely knee. Thousands of eyes like burning glasses directed at her, through which the hot rays would travel over her person and scorch and wither it up! How should she bear these glances and not cover her face with her hands as before a blast from a furnace? Would she have the fortitude to remember that Famine was knocking at the door of the apartment, and that his skeleton form was more dreadful to encounter than her own reflection in the glass clothed in a leopard-skin? She had found among the battered volumes that Dick flung about on the floor of his room an early volume of *Punch*, with a caricature of Father Thames in the days of his pollution, presenting his offspring to the fair city of London. There was a ghastly suggestion of Truca's face in the presentment of the youngest member of the terrifying trio, which never failed to make Eila feel that the martyrdom she had imposed on herself in Truca's behalf was but a light one after all. To give herself courage, she studied the caricature at odd moments in the day. She also tried to divert her mind by speculating upon the possible result of the day's expedition with the Wardens. If Mamy would only be wise and good (our use of these terms is for the most part purely subjective), her own sacrifice might prove unnecessary. But it was too late to turn back. As the French proverb said: "The wine was drawn, and it must now be drunk!" Bitter as was its flavour, she would drain it to the dregs. She had put her hand to the plough, or, rather, she had stretched it forth for the martyr's palm, and she would not draw it back. In any case, it was too late to save herself, since by breaking her engagement she would only succeed in aggravating the family distress. Even should Mamy be reasonable, Mrs. Warden might be less easy to convince than Eila herself had been willing to believe; and in any case the marriage could not take place for some time to come. With reflections of this nature, our heroine strove to arm herself for the evening's ordeal. She thought of Sainte Blandine, an early Christian saint, martyred many centuries ago by being placed in a red-hot chair, whereby her fair young flesh was frizzled living upon her bones.

"And she suffered this for Christianity," said Eila to herself. "Surely I care for my family as much as Sainte Blandine could have cared for an abstract idea! and there is no red-hot chair—no positive physical suffering of any kind, indeed—awaiting me. I have nothing to say, nothing to do, only to sit still and let myself be stared at, and to try and keep my thoughts fixed upon the possible joy of gaining eighty pounds to save my dear ones from starving."

It drew to a close at last—the long and weary day. Mrs. Clare had been assisted out of bed in the afternoon, and had spent two hours by the window lying back in a cane arm-chair, hired from the furniture dealer on the boulevard, upon the understanding that it should be paid for in English lessons to the dealer's daughter, a *demoiselle de magasin* in the Rue de la Paix, by young Mrs. Frost. Mrs. Clare had been eager to hear all the details of Mrs. Warden's visit, and had listened to them with a kind of bitter-sweet satisfaction depicted in her countenance. For the twentieth time she had reminded her children of that epoch before they were born, when it had been considered a condescension on their mother's part to invite Miss Lydia Simpson into the parlour of the Davey Street house wherein Mr. and Mrs. Clare, recently arrived in Hobart, had taken their first lodgings.

"Mrs. Simpson was a most vulgar-looking person, my dears, and there were some very queer stories connected with her coming to Hobart. As for Mrs. Warden, she never looks a lady, whatever she may put on." Eila had been giving her mother a detailed description of a blue fox boa worn by their visitor the day before. "There is something essentially commonplace in her appearance."

"It was kind of her to think of coming, anyhow," said Eila deprecatingly; "and really, mother, you would have admitted that Lucy looked charming at least."

"Don't talk to me of Lucy!" replied Mrs. Clare impatiently. "She's all very well in her fashionable clothes, I dare say; but I should like to know where Lucy would be without them—tell me that if you can. Not that it's to be wondered at, either; for of all the bad figures I ever saw, Mrs. Warden's is one of the worst."

"She hasn't *much* figure," Eila allowed—her mother was in the stage of convalescence which requires humouring—"but she has a kind heart. She seemed really anxious about you yesterday when I told her how ill you had been."

"Well, if she has any memory at all, she must remember that she has good cause to be grateful for what I did for her in the past. I remember when Mr. Warden first came to stay in the Davey Street house where we were lodging. We were very particular—at least, I was—about the acquaintances we made in a colony in those days, and we did not ask him into the parlour in the beginning. But would you believe? He would be found sitting on the staircase outside whenever I was playing or singing at the piano. Nothing could drag him away; and Miss Simpson—Mrs. Warden now—who was a buxom-looking girl with a false chignon, would seize the opportunity to go up and down stairs upon all kinds of pretexts, until the poor young man was inveigled into proposing to her. He came to ask me what I thought of it first, and if I had discountenanced it, Lydia Simpson would never have been Mrs. Warden to-day. But I dare say she finds it convenient to forget those times now."

"I suppose Mr. Warden was something like Sydney is to-day," said Eila.

"Just the same thick-set, awkward-looking youth—such a contrast to your poor father, my dear!"

"Yes; I know our father must have been handsome," said Eila. "So many people have told me so; and, then, I can just remember what he was like myself."

"Ay, that is one thing no one can rob you of," observed Mrs. Clare proudly, "your heritage of good looks. It is curious that, though I was married first, you were not born until Lucy was three or four years old. A plain little creature she was, too, with quite an old face. But you get your looks on both sides, one may say, though Mamy is the only one who has her father's skin."

In talk of this kind did Eila beguile the invalid's hours by the open window of the bare reception-room through the long afternoon. Conversation upon the present and future was avoided. There seemed to be so little to look forward

to, and a review of the actual condition would have been more depressing still. Under these circumstances it was advisable to fall back upon a long-vanished past. Involuntarily Eila was driven at this time to study certain aspects of her mother's character. It was evident that the lower the present declined, the more the past became magnified. Mrs. Clare had always been proud of her origin and early associations, but now she glorified herself in them to an extent unheard of before. To judge by her present impressions, there had never been such a commingling of blue blood and lordly descent as in the alliance between the De Merles and her father's family of the Wiltons. Of Mr. Clare less was said, the existence of Uncle William and the half-boxes of candles being impossible to ignore. On the other hand, the Chevalier was raised to an elevated perch in the genealogical tree.

The disappearance of Hubert de Merle, whom Mrs. Clare had come across the world to discover, was not often alluded to by her children. They felt that this must be a peculiarly sore point with their mother, and Eila's discovery that their cousin had possibly been in Australia while they were coming away in search of him was the last drop of bitterness added to the already overflowing cup of their disappointment.

The young Clares, moreover, were tender of their mother—tender of her weakness as of all that belonged to her; and even though their faith had become a little shaken in the royal antecedents of the Begum, they liked to have their imaginations stimulated by the ever-fascinating tale of her early adventures in the land of her adoption.

The days closed in earlier now. It was soon after six when the sun went down in a blaze of crimson and gold behind the soft lilac haze that shrouded the trees over the way.

When Eila had put her mother to bed, and given Truca her tea, she left Dick in charge, and prepared to go out upon her dread mission. She had found the pretext of a lesson to be given to the furniture dealer's daughter, adding that she had half arranged with her pupil to go to a late choral

service at St. Roch's; and never had she been more inclined to rejoice at her few years of seniority over Dick, which enabled her to put her foot upon his well-meant attempts at brotherly surveillance.

"You have enough to do in looking after Mamy," she said, in answer to his offer of accompanying her down the boulevard. "Don't trouble your head about me, Dick. Even in Paris a married woman is supposed to be able to take care of herself."

Nevertheless, her heart stood still as she walked past the man-concierge, who was smoking his pipe at the entrance to the *porte-cochère*, and who nodded at her, as she thought, with an insolent air, as though he had divined the object of her expedition. She pretended not to notice him, and walked stiffly by with her head erect, out upon the boulevard. Here she found herself in the midst of noise and turmoil. The clamorous orchestra of the Bal Bullier, towards which students and grisettes were hurrying, was distinctly audible, playing a wild waltz from the "Mousquetaires au Couvent." The lovely evening air was full of cigar-smoke and whiffs from patchouli and powder scented grisettes. Eila had concealed her face entirely in her board-ship veil, and covered her house-frock with a long ulster that was beginning to look sadly shabby in the day-time. Experience had taught her that it was wise to dissimulate the outward graces of her person on the Boulevard St. Michel.

She reached the Odéon unmolested, and clambering on the top of the huge omnibus waiting outside, took her seat on the farthest corner of the bench at right angles to the driver. The moon was rising in the night sky, and Eila thought of her childish contests with Dick on the score of its size as she drove solitary through the brilliant heart of Paris. The blinds against the windows of the entresols through which she had looked the other day were not all drawn, and occasionally she had a glimpse of a family seated at a round table at their evening meal. So small was the space, so low the ceilings, it almost looked as though they were living in a box. The river looked more beautiful than ever this evening, with the long spiral reflections from the lamps that

lined its shores trembling in its depths, and the red, green, and golden lights of the small river steamers darting hither and thither in the gloom. The Place du Carrousel looked fantastically lovely, with its triumphal arch and mighty Louvre Palace illumined by the heaven-high splendour of the Jablokoff electricity. Yet all the time Eila felt as though this beautiful night aspect of Paris were nothing but an imaginary and fanciful background to a weird and troubled dream, out of which she would presently wake to find herself leaning over the veranda at Cowa, watching the moon rise over the harbour. She had reached, in a measure, the state of feeling which all who sacrifice themselves heart and soul for a cause, Buddhists as well as Christians, enthusiasts of all creeds and all colours, seek to attain. She was fast losing the oppressive consciousness of her own personality. Her identity was becoming merged into her idea. If she could have maintained this feeling, Galatea in her marble coldness could not have shown herself more indifferent to the ardent glances of her sculptor-lover than she to the gaze of the crowd that awaited her. But the dreadful conviction that "life is real and life is earnest" came back to her with a tightening of her heart-strings as she descended from the omnibus and made her way with knees that trembled under her towards the Folies-Fantassin, along the ascending street, to where she saw the name of her torture-chamber picked out in flaming gas letters against the impalpable background of the night.

The sight of her actual goal did not make her pause for an instant. Before her mental vision this evening there rose a spectre that beckoned her on. She must keep her mother out of the hospital and her sisters and brothers from the streets, at whatever cost. Also, she must keep her thoughts from reverting to the ghastly little bottle in dark-blue glass, with octagonal sides, that the Hobart chemist had given her. She had allowed her imagination to wander to the poisoned phial more than was wise during the long night hours she had spent by her mother's bedside. Better be blotted out of existence, it had seemed to her sometimes, than continue to live upon such terms as these. What was

life worth, unless for the satisfaction of the senses with which we apprehend it? When it was merely an instrument for the torturing of these, what resource was left but to escape from it? Even if, as the Buddhists said, we were chained indefinitely to the wheel of existence, it was more than likely that the individualities with which we were actually burdened would come to an end with our lives upon this earth. And what mattered most at present was that Truca, and Mamy, and all of them, should cease to be tormented in their existing forms. Eila, I fear, was destitute of the quality known as moral courage; but, then, she had no foundation to rest it upon. The smallest spark of faith would have been more sustaining in such a plight as hers than all the philosophical reasoning in the world. But faith is no more to be got for the asking than any other desirable possession we may covet. It is confined, indeed, to a very limited number of minds. For the faith of a large proportion of the human race, in Ceylon and elsewhere, which holds that existence is a bad business on the whole, and that the sooner we free ourselves of it the better, is hardly deserving of the name. Neither is the faith that foreshadows stagnant beatitude or perpetual misery for the whole human race a staff to lean upon in time of trouble. The natural groundless faith peculiar to the optimist temperament, which holds, without knowing why, that everything will come right in the end, is the only kind of faith really worthy of being so called, and even this is apt to be affected by the liver. Eila had known this kind of unreasoning faith, induced by the mere ecstasy of living, upon certain heavenly mornings at Cowa, but it crumbled away, not before a liver out of order, which was a thing of which she was happily ignorant, but before the accumulation of family troubles that beset her.

The leprous-hued building, like many a battered belle in real life, gained by being surveyed by gaslight. Its leprous surface looked soft and creamy-hued behind its brilliant adornment of gas. The spectators were already crowding down the wide descending entrance, which made Eila think vaguely of the broad path that leadeth to destruction. She stood for an instant on one side, anxiously scanning their

faces through her veil, before seeking the side-entrance by which she had been told to enter. For an instant she felt a wild impulse to stop each person who passed her, and to say, "Please let me tell you why I am going to do this to-night; it is because we are without bread in the house, and my mother is ill—not for any other reason." Yet why torment herself after all about the construction the spectators might put upon her action? Why think of them as human beings at all? For her the crowd should be like the corporation of Sir Edward Coke—a thing that had no soul. What matter what the crowd thought of her if it only gave her the preference! What were the people to her or she to them? They would never see her again. For them she was a mere passing apparition, without name or individuality—not the Eila Clare of Hobart of whose fair repute Reginald was so jealous. Thus reflecting, she passed into the building.



## PART II.

### CHAPTER I.

#### AT THE ANTIPODES.

SOME two or three years before the Hegira of the Clare family, Tarragunyah Station, situated on the border of Queensland and New South Wales, presented, at the end of the shearing season, a vast undulating expanse of brown and yellow carpet, covered with dark-toned trees and shrubs, among which a Linnæus would doubtless have discovered endless varieties of different families in the vegetable world, but which to the ordinary observer, like the squatter who now rode among them, conveyed no impression but that of a most disastrous sameness. Indeed, scraggy she-oak trees, and scaggier gums, whether blue or red ; native cherry, mimosa, and myrtle—all look equally black and uncultured upon a cursory inspection. There is nothing green and bounteous in their demeanour, like that of their leafier sisters in the Old World—no sweet change of fashion with every succeeding season ; no ermine mantle in the winter, no coat of many colours in the autumn ; no downy budding in the spring, nor luxurious thicket of verdure in the summer. Dark, sullen, and frowning, oftentimes with their ragged bark hanging in tatters about them like the torn apparel of some sturdy beggar, they wear the same forbidding aspect from year's end to year's end ; and save where groves of native plum-trees cast a soft blue halo upon the distant landscape, or where in certain favoured gullies giant ferns and tropic creepers twine round each other with Brazilian luxuriance, or where, again, upon fertile mountain slopes the mighty

eucalyptus towers to heaven wreathed with the wild convolvulus, they could never inspire that feeling of love and reverence which led the Druids of old to kneel beneath the shadow of the oak, and which has moved poets in all ages to sing impassioned songs of the forest trees and sylvan bowers of "merrie England."

The squatter, however, riding over the Tarragunyah plains to-day did not bestow much thought upon the monotony of their aspect. Years of familiarity had bred, if not contempt, at least indifference, in his mind. He knew eternal sameness to be the prevailing characteristic of the Australian Bush—knew that it presented, indeed, one of those rare types in which a study of the part is almost equal to a study of the whole; and knew at the same time that he had not come to Australia, like Dr. Syntax, upon a tour in search of the picturesque, but simply because it had served his purpose and his interests to expatriate himself. He had had reasons for preferring to invest his money in a station in Australia to sinking it in some vague speculation in the Old World, though, for all the return it had given him, he might as well have hidden it, like the man with his one talent, in a napkin. He had sunk some ten thousand pounds in Tarragunyah, and sometimes it appeared to him that he had sunk them so effectually that he would never be able to bring them to the surface again. He had thought as much, at least, until quite lately, when Dame Fortune had suddenly waved her wand in the direction of a certain ridge of hills that ran slantwise across his run. Whether she was merely mocking him, or whether she had some serious purpose in her action, he had yet, however, to determine, and it was this thought that was uppermost in his mind as he rode on his homeward way. The homestead stood upon rising ground in the midst of far-stretching plains. These plains were dotted, as we have seen, with sombre, ungraceful trees, and clothed in parts with a tangle of scrub. At their best, when the grass was at its prime, their surface was sparsely brushed with yellowish green; at their worst, they were brown and shrivelled, and scored by cracks and fissures, with a burning air shimmering over them, and traces of the

passage of starving sheep and bullocks in the bones that strewed their tracks. The season of the year when the squatter rode over them was a summer's evening in February, and pleasant are the images that the words call up to those who connect summer with English fields and hedgerows, moist with falling dew, and echoing with the song of thrush and lark. How different a vision do they evoke in the mind of a native-born Australian! As the squatter rode on his way, an occasional whirl of dust, driven high into the air by the scorching wind, enveloped his head like a cloud. The air was heavy with dust; the harsh leaves of the trees were hidden under it. A colony of hungry flies followed horse and rider, settling in black clusters wherever they could find settling-place; and each time the hungriest of the band was driven away, he returned, like the devil in the Scriptures, with seven devils worse than himself.

The horse clearly knew his way home; for his rider, holding a slack rein, allowed him to take his own direction, and to go at his own preferred jog-trot pace. There was no living soul to observe either, though, had there been such an one, his attention would not long have rested upon the horse. Not that the animal was unworthy of notice, albeit of wild stock and unknown pedigree; for he had points that would have recommended him instantly to a connoisseur. But as we are ever more apt to be struck by the strange and grotesque than by the beautiful and well-proportioned, these points would only have served to bring into stronger relief the uncouth form of the person who bestrode him. It was only too evident at a glance that the squatter was what the French expressively call *mal venu*. He had taken off his coat, which was strapped in front of him on his saddle; and, in his gray Crimean shirt, his deformity became doubly apparent. It was a deformity that there was no disguising. The squatter was a hunchback; and, in common with all hunchbacks, his head appeared to protrude angularly from between his misshapen shoulders. The face, like those of the unfortunates to which he belonged, must have been long and peaky in extreme youth; now it was large, harsh, and rugged, partly concealed, however, under a coarse black

beard and moustache. Even so, it would have worn the pathetic expression that comes from the constant strain of the eyes in an upward direction, in the effort to take in surrounding objects, had it not been for the determination its owner betrayed that he would not allow himself to be pitied. There is no such thing as a habitual scowl, except, perhaps, on the face of a stage Quilp; but there are expressions which are not far removed from it. The eyes of the squatter seemed to say, "Pity me if you dare, and be d——d!" and, as no one cares to gain the latter form of benediction, there were not many found to risk bestowing the former. What Hubert de Merle really thought about himself, no one knew. Nature—that is, God and devil in one—had employed her twofold power when she fashioned him; for she had given him the perception and understanding of grace and beauty, and then had mocked him by imprisoning these faculties in a distorted body.

The human imagination has loved at all times to picture a sphere in which the outward presentment of the individual shall be the complete expression of his inward nature—a sphere where the body shall be nothing but the plastic garb of the spirit animating it, like the delicate and transparent drapery that clings round the sculptured form of a Greek goddess. There is compensation in such a fancy for the melancholy fact that in our actual state our bodies are often sad misfits. We can cast off at our will an ungainly or ill-fitting garb; but what are we to do when our immaterial selves are encased in a fleshly covering that is a constant outrage to them? To bring ourselves into harmony with our personalities, we should have to do constant violence to our instincts. This was the fate of Hubert de Merle, owner or part owner of Tarragunyah. If his outward man could have been moulded by his inner spirit, he would have possessed in all likelihood the form of an Apollo Belvedere—not, perhaps, that his moral character, or even his mind, would have been completely and faultlessly balanced, far from it; but that his appreciation of perfect proportions and harmony of outline was so instinctive and keen. Under such circumstances, it might also

have happened that his better qualities would have gained the ascendant. It is so easy to feel benevolently disposed and indulgent towards the world when we are well satisfied with ourselves, since, after all, it is only our own moods that the people and objects about us reflect. Hubert, being made as he was, could not give expression to the transcendental part of his nature, for the reason that he was too morbidly alive to the incongruity of the material part of it. From the time when he had attained to self-consciousness, which is almost coincident in intelligent beings with the consciousness of existence itself, this terrible truth had been borne in upon his mind—that he must stifle all impulses of admiration, of enthusiasm, and of love, for they could never react upon himself. In his childish days, he had found it in his heart to wish that he had been born blind as well as deformed. Better be enveloped eternally in the darkness of Hades than dwell open-eyed and sentient in the hell of Tantalus. Perhaps if he could have brought himself to accept pity and sympathy, his lot would have been less hard; but pity he resented even more fiercely than repulsion. What was it but another way of reminding him that he was an outcast and a pariah—a creature of whom the most that could be said by his fellow-creatures was “Poor devil!” as they turned their heads in another direction?

It was in giving Hubert this particular kind of temperament that Nature had dealt so hardly by him. There was no reason why, when she gave him a hump, she should not have given him at the same time the mirthful qualities which cause the French to say of a person who laughs heartily, “*Il rit comme un bossu*”; no reason why she should have bestowed extra clear-sightedness, sensitiveness and appreciation of form and colour upon him. She might have given him recklessness, or indifference, or stolidity, in which case he would speedily have discovered that his deformity made no more difference to others than it did to himself, and that it need not, and did not, stand in the way of his doing and enjoying most things that other men did and enjoyed. The world, as we all know, takes us at our own valuation. There are only a very few with discernment enough to establish a

standard of their own. Had Hubert taken his affliction indifferently, the world would have taken it indifferently. If he had taken it merrily, the world would have taken it merrily. He chose to take it tragically. It was in the order of things that the world should take it tragically also. It was a satisfaction to him to say bitter and caustic things, though the opportunity for saying them was limited, seeing that for some ten or fifteen years he had led an almost isolated existence in the heart of the Australian Bush. Whence he had come no one knew. There were rumours that he had been in New Caledonia in his earlier years, though in what capacity no one ventured to inquire. His library bore evidence that he had studied much, and that he still continued to study. The latest works on scientific subjects found their way from Europe to his homestead. He remained in touch with the Old World, and kept pace with new developments of literature in France and England. Thus, he was familiar with the "decadents" and the "symbolistes" in his far-away retreat—centuries away, to all seeming, from modern civilization—before the echo of their writings had spread to England. A man with an active intellect, who never sleeps more than six hours out of the twenty-four, who has (even when allowance is made for meals, and dressing, and riding upon a squatter's rounds) six or seven hours per diem to give to his books—a man who possesses, moreover, a memory like a vice—may lay in a large fund of book-lore in the course of ten years of a solitary and studious existence. It was not surprising that Hubert should carry about a kind of encyclopædia in his brain. Unfortunately the heart has claims as well as the brain, but of this fact he did his utmost to fight down all reminders.

Before he came to the end of his ride, the homestead, standing upon a piece of rising ground, loomed in view. The horse had taken, as he might well be trusted to do, the shortest and directest route home, and the white walls of the cottage shone, as in a picture, from amid their setting of wild fuchsia-bushes, interspersed with the bright green foliage of the native plum. The station buildings formed three sides of a square, of which the dwelling-house repre-

sented one side, the stores another, the kitchen and men's hut a third. There were outlying buildings and sheds at a certain distance from the house, and post and rail fences enclosing paddocks where the station-milkers and horses ungroomed were running at liberty. The buildings were made of cob, a kind of sun-dried clay, tempered and worked with water and dry grass; they looked compact and comfortable. The walls of the homestead were whitewashed, and surrounded by a deep, cool veranda. The roof was thatched with coarse grass. Four kangaroo dogs and a collie ran lightly forward with yelps and bounds of welcome as the squatter approached, and a man who was leaning against a fence smoking his pipe sauntered across the square past the monster wood-heap to take his employer's horse. It was past seven in the evening, and all the inmates had time and to spare on their hands. Hubert dismounted with his habitual half-sullen nod at the man. Standing next to him, the misshapen outline of his dwarfed body was more perceptible than ever against the whitening evening sky. He walked slowly towards the house and entered it by the back-door, standing—like all the other doors in the establishment—wide open. There was no upper story. A broad passage, covered with coir matting, ran lengthways through the house, connecting the front and back doors. Along this passage a young man with a pipe in his mouth, and with a generally sun-burnt and sunny face, came forward to meet him.

The squatter's expression brightened visibly as he approached.

"So you're back, Wilton?" he said. His voice was musical, and might have suggested that of a rejuvenated Faust, had you heard it from behind a screen. "I didn't expect you so soon."

He had raised his eyes as he spoke—dark, resentful, brooding eyes, that were scarcely on a level with the young man's chest—and the look of welcome that shone in them transformed them pleasantly for a moment.

"Yes, I'm back," replied the young man, holding out his hand and exchanging a cordial greeting with the "boss."

Half the conversation in life is made up of obvious remarks of this kind. "I've got through with the business sooner than I expected."

Hubert looked up quickly with a half-eager gesture of inquiry. He had been standing with his riding-whip in his hand, his coat carelessly attached by one button round his neck, while the empty sleeves dangled loosely over his half-discovered breast—hairy as an Orson's. He wore a conical-shaped felt wideawake of the approved brigand pattern, beneath which his thick grizzled hair, that greatly needed trimming, hung dusty and unkempt. He might have been still under forty, or considerably over that age. It would have been difficult to determine whether the lines on the forehead were the result of much working of the brows in frowning, in straining the eyes upwards, or of age. The nose was rugged, with a suggestion of Hebraic origin in its curves. The eyelids were singularly thick, with a short stubble of dark lash. As he stood there, with the dust of the plains marking every seam upon his harsh countenance, as though with a charcoal pencil, his whip in his hand and his hat thrust back from his temples, he was an object out of whose path a woman or child meeting him alone would have stepped hastily.

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## CHAPTER II.

### HUBERT'S PROPHECY.

"WELL, what did the experts say?" was his first eager question. "Is our discovery worth following up?"

Jack Wilton did not answer immediately in words. He was one of those people to whom Nature seems to have accorded the privilege, in a mood of kind caprice, of doing ungraceful things gracefully. The gesture with which he replied to the squatter's question by laying his right finger against his nose and playfully kicking up his left leg like a colt that has been touched on the hock, would have been



offensively vulgar and flippant in another person. Performed by him, it conveyed nothing but the expression of a concentrated glee and triumph past conveying in words, and that the squatter apprehended it in this sense was clear from the gleam of corresponding satisfaction that flitted for an instant across his sombre face.

"So it's turned out trumps?" he said. "Well, I'm not surprised. Come in, and let me hear all you've done from the beginning."

Jack Wilton obeyed. "It" related to a notable discovery that had been made some months ago at Tarragunyah. Riding one day upon his rounds—for Jack condescended to do amateur boundary-rider upon occasion—his attention had wandered to a strange jagged line of low hills on Tarragunyah run. Along the top of this ridge was a heavy outcrop of rusty, burned-looking stone, that he recognised at once as iron-stone. He had broken off a piece of it, more from curiosity than from any other motive, and had carried it to the head station, where it had lain kicking about until Hubert, who had a knowledge of geology, as of all else, picked it up and declared it to be the outcrop of some mineral lode. The matter did not rest there. Two days later, Hubert himself, accompanied by Jack, the boundary-rider, a shepherd, and a worn-out miner, who happened to be knocking about the run in the undefined capacity of "generally useful man," sallied forth with picks and shovels, and sunk a small shaft. The stuff extracted was judged by Mr. de Merle to be worth testing, and Jack, who was equally pleased to leave Tarragunyah or to come back to it, upon the "anything for a change" principle, was despatched to Sydney, where his father was a physician with a fashionable practice, to have the ore analyzed. The analyst had declared the specimen to be exceptionally rich in silver, and as the possession of a silver-mine may signify the holding of an Aladdin's purse to the happy possessor, Jack's triumph as he recounted the good news was not unnatural.

"It'll be a glorious thing if it *does* turn out trumps, as you say," he concluded confidentially. "I've been having

a talk with the old governor this time down in Sydney, and he's got a lot of worry, I tell you."

"Why, I thought your father had such a good practice," interposed Hubert.

"So he has; but they keep up a lot of style. You've no idea how much it costs. I've got three sisters out now, and not one of 'em married or even engaged; and it's driving and shopping from morning till night. The poor old governor has all his work cut out for him, I tell you."

This "I tell you" was Jack Wilton's watchword; he employed it almost unconsciously, in season and out of season, to give an additional weight to the statements which his limited phraseology seemed to him to convey inadequately to the understanding of his hearers. Eloquence, indeed, was not one of his strong points, but he had others which served him, perhaps, in better stead. He was essentially well favoured and pleasant to look upon. His eyes were blue enough to be attractive for their colour alone, independently of all their other qualities; and he bore the air of having been warmed and gilded by the sun, until something of the influence of that radiant orb had passed into his hair, his glance, and even his expression. Hubert could have found it in his heart to say of Jack as Desdemona said of Othello, that he wished "Heaven had made him such a man." Jack was his David, and without the aid of a harp could charm the evil spirit from his breast by the mere magic of his presence. He was the only being in whose society the deformed man was able to forget that he was not as other men, and from the day that Jack had come to do "jackaroo" on Tarragunyah station, its owner had tasted for almost the first time the sweets of human companionship.

Not that Jack was in any respect the intellectual mate of his friend and employer. He had no pretensions and no ambitions other than to be a good shot and a first-rate rider. In the eyes of the world he was simply a more than ordinarily good-looking and good-hearted young fellow, whom men and women—women especially—were certain to like. In his own eyes his physical graces counted as nothing. He

had not sufficient imagination to picture existence without them, and would have told you in all good faith that he would as lief be Hubert de Merle as himself. It was this want of appreciation of personal gifts that the other would have esteemed so passionately that had drawn Hubert to him in the first instance. The gulf which separated the hunchback, to his own thinking, from his fellowmen seemed to disappear when he was in Jack's company. • The lad, moreover, had a wondering veneration for the squatter's lore. Though he did not understand a word of Greek or German or French, and though his vocabulary was limited to an Australian slang rendering of his mother-tongue, there had yet been evenings in camp upon cattle-mustering expeditions, when the two men had lain wrapped in their rugs, with their feet to the fire and their eyes to the stars, and when the younger had tasted a new pleasure in hearing the elder roll out fragments of Euripides, scenes from "Faust," or sonorous passages from Victor Hugo. His nearest approach to an understanding of intellectual delights was embodied in the hearing of these spontaneous recitations. He experienced, unknown to himself, the symbolist's pleasure of gathering sensation and emotion from the juxtaposition of words, unhampered by ideas.

Hubert had taken him upon his station some two years previously, at the age of nineteen, and at the outset it would have been difficult to say whether he would regard his jackaroo aid with liking or with hatred. The latter contingency might have seemed the more probable, for there was something almost insolent in Jack's good looks when seen by the side of his ill-favoured boss. The contrast was suggestive of nothing but Apollo and Vulcan keeping house together; and no one was more keenly alive to the contrast than Hubert himself. But Jack was so unconscious of it on his own side, and so blunt in his perceptions of beauty in any of its manifestations, that the morbid self-consciousness of the other was mollified. From tolerating the young man, he had come to like him. Jack Wilton served as a perpetual reminder of the fact that there was, after all, something in the consoling theory of the equalization of lots:

“ For some ha’ meat and eanna eat,  
And some ean eat and have na meat,  
So let the Lord be praised.”

Jack had the attributes of Phoebus, the sun-god, and no appreciation of them. Hubert had appreciation, but no attributes. There were, nevertheless, times when it angered him to think of the keen pleasure he would himself have extracted from life had he been clothed in Jack's body. What riches are comparable to those of youth, and health, and outward graces bound up with our very being? With Jack's physical advantages, Hubert would have given the reins to all his impulses, for he possessed an Oriental imagination. The Turkish idea of Paradise had the stronger hold upon his secret fancy that he had been but grudgingly admitted into its outer courts upon earth. Had he been in the position of a Nero, he would have wished, not that his fellow-men had one neck, that he might decapitate them at a blow, but that his sister women had one mouth, that he might press his lips to theirs in a single embrace. Such stormy episodes as he had been through in his earlier years were only vaguely hinted at in the colonies. It was noticed when he was beside himself with anger that he swore strange oaths, which those versed in such matters declared to be French. It was also rumoured that he had played a *rôle* in the Commune, and had escaped being shot judicially for the sole reason that he had been wounded in a street fray, and had been carted away to the hospital. Whether there was any truth in the rumour, whether, as was asserted by some, he had really seen gaol life in New Caledonia, or whether he had only gone thither, as he himself gave out, upon a mission from the French Government, no one in Australia rightly knew. Nor did anyone make a particular point of inquiring. “The world forgetting, by the world forgot,” Hubert kept, as the common saying goes, “himself to himself” in his lonely homestead at Tarragunyah, and no one had any motive for dragging him out of it. Even Jack, to whom he felt nearer than to any being upon earth, had never ventured to question him about his past career. It was the young man's belief that the squatter had omnipo-

tent knowledge, not only as regarded books, but as regarded all that men may do, can do, and dare do in the world. He would have liked to hear all about his experiences of life in the wonderful European capitals, but though, when Hubert was in the vein, he would condescend to enter into a few details concerning the Grand Prix or a masked ball at the opera, in response to Jack's eager questions, no reference to his own doings ever crossed his lips. Jack had ended by accepting his silence upon these points as final. The station and its affairs offered congenial topics for general conversation, or, when these were exhausted, there was always the theme of colonial politics to fall back upon. Besides which, the two men had been long upon the intimate footing that renders silence on both sides a natural and easy way of enjoying mutual companionship. Hubert could read and smoke by the hour together without apparent fatigue, his uncomely, shaggy head hardly reaching to the top of the old station armchair in which he sat crouched. Jack, though he could not read for long at a time, could smoke unobtrusively through an entire evening, content, after he had read the colonial papers and studied the *Queensland Mail* from end to end, to sing or whistle, or, if these resources failed, to go 'possum-shooting by moonlight with the dogs at his heels.

Tarragunyah was not a magnificent specimen of a squatter's abode. The room chiefly inhabited by Hubert and his aid had no pretensions to style. Tables and sideboard heaped with the evidences of the male presence in pipes, tobacco-pouches, cartridge-boxes, odd straps, bags of seeds, newspapers, writing materials, the inevitable whisky-bottle and tumblers, with some odd samples of wool, represented its principal appointments. Guns and native weapons were ranged around the walls. Bookshelves, whereon books of every description lay piled in confusion, were the only superfluous luxuries. Hubert's books, indeed, overflowed the establishment. They climbed from floor to ceiling in the sitting-room, reduced his sleeping-room to the size of a cabin by the space they filled upon the walls, and besides appropriating the whole of the spare room, thrust themselves

into every available corner in Jack's chamber wherein they could find standing or lying room.

For two years the monotony of life upon the station had been broken by nothing more eventful than the every-day occurrences of Bush life. The lambing and the foaling, the breaking in of two-year-olds and three-year-olds, cattle-mustering and cattle-draughting, bullock-branding and bullock-slaying, two Bush fires, and one flood, these had been the only events that had marked the even tenour of the way at Tarragunyah. Jack had taken periodical leaves during the so-called Carnival Week in Melbourne and Race Week in Sydney, returning for the most part a sadder if not a wiser man. For the rest, he put his mind and heart into the interests of Tarragunyah, in which his father, a Sydney doctor with aristocratic pretensions, had bought him a part share.

But now had come the first hint of a change, which promised to lift Tarragunyah and its owners from the ruck of Australian stations worked by their own proprietors for evermore. It was upon a February evening that Jack had returned with the great news of the analyst's verdict on the Tarragunyah ore, and the same night he and Hubert discussed the matter as they sat smoking together in the warm blackness of the front veranda after dinner. The rough-and-ready (rougher, perhaps, than ready) married couple who served them had cleared away the roast wild turkey and the omelette of emu's eggs that had formed their evening meal, and now they had carried their cups of black coffee, the only foreign innovation introduced by Hubert, into the less stifling atmosphere without. Less stifling in a relative sense only, for even here the air was thick with heat and flies, and had it not been for the tobacco-smoke they would have drawn but dust-laden breaths. No tuneless note disturbed the sullen stillness of the hour. Only from time to time the sad wail of the curlew was borne through the night, while from beneath a native shrub in the darkening garden a morepork uttered his solemn croaking refrain. Hubert liked the friendly veil of darkness that covered him. In his younger days he had had dreams of

adoring a beautiful mistress upon the terms on which Cupid possessed Psyche—a mistress who should know him as a wooer by night alone. He leaned back in his wicker-chair, taking slow puffs at his cigar, while the lithe kangaroo dog, that, by a curious contradiction, never noticed Jack when Hubert was by, thrust his head between his master's knees and whined for a caress. Jack was sitting, American fashion, with his feet thrown over the veranda railing as he tilted back his chair at an angle that only long practice guaranteed against the ignominy of a capsized. The accustomed pipe was between his lips, and unwonted dreaminess in the gaze he directed through the darkness at the night sky.

"It's a rum go," he said at last, in abstracted tones, after a long and profound silence.

"What is?" asked Hubert, with lazy scorn in his accents.

"Why, life altogether—the whole blessed business. I'm hanged if I can make head or tail of it when I get to thinking about it. It's a good thing for me, I tell you, that I don't often puzzle my brains about it, for I believe I should go off my chump altogether if I did. Look at those patches in the sky up there—right up beyond the Southern Cross—the white and the black; you don't mean to tell me those are all filled up with worlds?"

"What white and what black?" asked Hubert, always with the same inflexion of good-natured contempt. "The Milky Way, do you mean? Well, I believe it is pretty generally allowed by those who know that there are millions of planetary systems in the course of formation over there, not to speak of those that are in full swing already. *Après?*"

"And then that black patch," Jack went on; "the boundary-rider told me the other day—he's a regular learned chap, the boundary-rider—he told me if there were any stars in it, or planets, as he called 'em, they were so far off you couldn't get a sight of them even through the telescope. What I want to know is, where does it come to a stop?"

"It doesn't stop at all," said Hubert quietly. "It's eternity, whose end no eye can reach."

"It's got to come to some kind of a stop, anyhow," declared Jack oracularly, "though it beats me, I tell you."

"You're not the only one who's been beaten by that problem," said Hubert indifferently. "Time and space are nicely calculated to shake our dispositions

" ' With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls.'

But what has induced these profound reflections ? I always took it for granted you were of those who accepted the green-cheese theory of the moon, if you gave the moon a thought at all. Have the bookmakers been making things unpleasant for you at Randwick ?"

"The bookmakers ? Not they ! I haven't given them another chance of lambing me down, I tell you. No ! it all came into my head while I was looking at the stars. I've been thinking about the silver-mine and one thing and another till my head's in a whirl. All of a sudden something seemed to tell me it wasn't worth making such a fuss about, any way ; for if it's all true, what you've been saying, our own affairs are such a drop in the bucket, after all——"

"Our own affairs !" exclaimed Hubert. "Why, man, for all you know, the world, the very universe itself, is a mere drop in the ocean. But unless you turn Trappist, which would be one way of settling the difficulty, you'll have to give your own affairs the biggest place in it, after all. What were you telling me about your father this afternoon ? He's not in any serious difficulties, I hope——"

"No—oh no !" said Jack hastily. He got up from his chair as though to shake off the unusual thoughts that had been oppressing him, and took one or two turns up and down the veranda. When he next spoke, his voice had resumed its usual unemotional tones. There was no ring of English cultivation, but a pleasant well-to-do, sure-of-yourself, devil-may-care colonial inflexion in it. "You see," he said thoughtfully, "the governor's had his nose to the grindstone the best part of his life. It's about time he thought of taking a rest ; but while my mother and the girls go the pace, as they do, there's not much chance of his getting a holiday. He told me this time I mustn't draw upon him the same as I did last year, or he'd never be able to go on paying his life-policy to the end."



Hubert smoked gravely in silence for a few moments. Then he said between the puffs:

"I don't believe in counting your chickens before they're hatched, but I wouldn't take a hundred thousand pounds down in cash at this moment for my share in the new mine. If I'm not very much mistaken, you won't want to draw on your father, and he can double his life-policy and retire with a fortune before two years are over."

Jack grunted, whether from satisfaction or as a sign of incredulity it would be hard to say.

"First thing I'd do," he said after a pause, "when everything was fixed, I'd take a trip home. A fellow doesn't feel half a man, I tell you, until he's seen the world, and I reckon you'd come too. If we could go together, and you were to show me the ropes! What a lark it would be—eh, commander?"

The foregoing appellation was a title Jack had hit upon for his patron from the outset without having given, however, the subject any previous consideration. He could not call Hubert "governor," which was a name sacred to his own father. "Boss" was too familiar, and "sir" or "Mr. de Merle" savoured of the schoolmaster or Mentor. At the same time, as Jack was in the position of a subordinate, and almost young enough to be his employer's son, he did not like to address him by either of his names stripped of a prefix, nor yet to address him upon all occasions without naming him at all. There was, moreover, a suggestion of something not to be trifled with in Hubert's manner of giving his orders that made the title of commander peculiarly suitable to him, and once adopted, Jack continued to employ it almost unconsciously.

In answer to the proposal that he should accompany Mr. Wilton to Europe, if things turned out as might be expected, Hubert shook his head. The words, however, were responsible for inducing a state of mind that Jack was far from divining; though, even had he divined, he would have been equally far from comprehending it. In his secret heart Mr. de Merle was gratified that his companionship should be desired by his unsophisticated "jackaroo," for the wish

could not possibly be prompted by any other motive than the original and humorous one of a personal sympathy and liking for him. Had he been a woman, the case might have worn another aspect, for then Jack might have desired to have him as a foil, though even so, a woman with Jack's looks would have been handsome enough to hold her own without the aid of any such grotesque contrast. A hundred conflicting thoughts coursed through Hubert's brain as he pondered over the questions that Jack's words seemed to open up. Supposing he could bring himself to get a kind of flavour at second-hand out of Jack's experiences and adventures, or even to take a vicarious enjoyment in his conquests and *bonnes fortunes* during their travels? Might not such a course be preferable to the one he had hitherto forced himself to follow, of crushing down every germ of sentiment and emotion in himself? If he should, indeed, make up his mind to accompany this young Adonis on his European travels, he must prepare to accept one of two alternatives. Either he must be devoured by a burning jealousy of him, and must endure purgatorial tortures every time a woman's glance should wander with pitying repulsion from Jack's face to his own, or he must force himself once for all to seek his own personal and individual satisfaction in Jack's triumphs. The proverb says, "Half a loaf is better than no bread;" but this seemed hardly to fit the case, for Hubert would not have even a crumb of Jack's loaf to his share. On the contrary, the only appeasement he could look for would be that the more he himself should starve the more Jack would eat his fill. Hitherto the line already quoted of "Some have meat and canna eat," had most fittingly described Jack's position; but Hubert was sure that neither the appetite nor the meat would be wanting when the young man came to realize the full meaning of travelling "for his pleasure." But he could not review the situation in his own mind as calmly as he would have wished. The hardest reflection was the consciousness that in so far as he himself was concerned a whole volcano full of mispent enthusiasm and passion lay hidden beneath his uncouth and repellant exterior. Why was he made so? Why

had Nature singled him out as her special butt and victim? Why had she given him a temperament that rendered his misshapen body so sorry a joke? Why had she caused his pulses to beat more quickly, his blood to flow more rapidly than other men's? He felt as though a beaker of the warm South had been poured into his veins to ferment and turn to vinegar. Had he not fought against the wild impulses that surged up within him? When he condemned himself to the life of a recluse in the Australian Bush, it was not, as some said, to increase his store of wealth, or, as others hinted, because he bore a branded name. The thing that had driven him into the wilderness was the conflict between his own dreams and the horrible reality. Nothing could alleviate the bitterness of that, though he would have rushed into the most reckless of dissipations to purchase an hour of forgetfulness. If he could have found relief in the wildest orgies, such orgies as laid the Roman Empire in the dust, he would not have hesitated to take part in them. But here again Nature had interposed with a diabolical refinement of cruelty. He could not drown his trouble in debauch. It would have been not only indifferent, but hateful to him. He must have all or nothing—a grand passion or nothing at all—his ideal made incarnate, or the crushing out of the ideal altogether. But where was the woman who would stoop to him, or who would dream of looking for the prince's soul through the life-long disguise of the beast? Away with such pitiful illusions! Let him flee to the uttermost limits of the earth. He would not even assume the mask of a woman-hater, lest he should draw down added ridicule upon his person. He would content himself with ignoring the existence of one-half of the human creation entirely. And upon this principle he acted, or tried to act throughout his Australian career. The only representative of the fair sex who had ever been seen at Tarragunyah was the bigger if not the better half of Alexander, the stockman, a bony, weather-beaten Scotchwoman with about as much suggestion of feminine graces as a jointed Dutch doll. . . . But now St. Anthony was to be dragged from his cave, and Hubert was to be forced away from Tarragunyah.

## CHAPTER III.

## MAMY SEES THE OWNER OF THE RUBY.

It was not at the Continental, after all, that Mamy was introduced to the splendours of a *table d'hôte* in a first-class Paris hotel. Mrs. Warden had declared herself in favour of the Louvre, which had not yet been swallowed up in the mighty *Magazin du Louvre*, and thither the party repaired after a day full of entrancing delights to at least one among its members. Mamy was intoxicated by the atmosphere of luxury into which she had been plunged since the morning. The sight of the magnificent equipages that thronged the tree-lined Champs Elysées on their way to the Bois, and an occasional glimpse of some especially gracious and lovely lady inside (despite her knowledge of the works of Balzac and Dumas Fils, our little girl was not versed enough in the ways of the world to recognise the queens of the *demi-monde* when she saw them), were still in her mind as she took her seat between Lucy and her brother at a side-table in the splendid dining-room of the hotel. She was not already so satiated with magnificence as to be indifferent to the new phase of it she now beheld. A Boulevard St. Michel Duval was the grandest type of restaurant Mamy had hitherto seen ; and at the Louvre the gorgeous painted ceiling, the heavy gilding of the cornices, the glow of colour represented by the pictures on the walls—real suggestions of real old masters, freshly painted and varnished—appeared to her a combination of palatial pomp and splendour that surpassed all her imaginings. It was pleasant to experience for once how kings and queens fared in their daily lives, for assuredly kings and queens could not sit down to table amid grander surroundings than these. A little sun-burned, owing to the lack of the parasol, her eyes shining with the reflection of all they absorbed and were still absorbing, Mamy leant back in her chair, and looked up at the ceiling with naïve awe and wonderment. In this posture she looked so like a seraph let loose for a holiday that she attracted the notice of two travellers, who,

it is needless to say, were of the male sex, and who were likewise seated at a little table in the vicinity of the one selected by Mrs. Warden.

The travellers in question did not appear to find the same charm as Mamy did in detailing the decorations of the dining-room, which, doubtless, conveyed no other impression to their minds than that of furnishing a suitable background to a tolerable repast. Mamy's personality attracted them more than the goddesses who figured in the pseudo "old masters" on the walls; and, finally, the younger of the two, a man with close-clipped yellow hair and pleasant blue eyes, remarked approvingly :

"What a jolly little girl over there staring up at the ceiling! She's bound to be English or American, though she might be Australian, too; for I could take my oath I've seen that other girl next to her somewhere—the one with the pale cheeks, I mean. I've seen her on some lawn in Australia—at a cup-meeting or a tennis-meeting, I don't know which. What a queer thing memory is! If I'd seen her at a ball, I dare say I shouldn't have known her again."

The person addressed looked in the direction indicated by the speaker, but immediately turned away his head. He had encountered a glance of pained and startled bewilderment that did not encourage further investigation. The personality of this individual was not, indeed, of a kind to be overlooked, if only for the painful reason that he was not as other men. Apart, however, from the prominence of his deformity, which seemed to suggest the presence of a yoke like that of a beast of burden concealed under his coat, there was something in the face that immediately impressed itself upon the imagination. There are faces that have this peculiar power; we hardly know why, though perhaps when the secrets of hypnotism and magnetism are better understood, the explanation may be found in the simple fact that their owners have compelling wills. Set upon an ordinary man's shoulders, a certain rugged attractiveness might have been found in the head; in the rough-hewn features and dark eyes full of a smouldering fire—eyes that could not by any possibility belong to a native of Northern climes, or to

one of phlegmatic Teutonic origin. Mamy had turned away after an involuntary glance of half-terrified curiosity at the strange figure. She thought that Orson, in the story of Valentine and Orson, might perhaps have resembled him, or, for the matter of that, the devil in "Paradise Lost."

The young man opposite to him was as great a contrast as a spring sunrise to a midnight storm. Jack Wilton had gained his end, and congratulated himself both secretly and openly upon being "shown the ropes" by such an authority as his friend and "boss," the commander. His respect for Hubert was more than ever increased by perceiving that he spoke French like a native.

"I'll be hanged if the French you and the rest of 'em talk over here is the same we learned at the grammar-school!" he said naïvely one day. "I was top of the French class, too; but, Lord! it's no particle of use to me in France."

At the Louvre it was Hubert who arranged the *menu*, and gave the orders to the waiter, handing, however, the wine-card to his friend to make such choice as might please him.

"Lafitte and Mumm," Jack said diffidently, after a long pondering of the names, many of which were unknown to him; "but if you would rather have any other sort——"

"Lafitte and Mumm are good enough for me," Hubert said shortly, as he signed to the waiter, and pointed to the names selected.

"I don't see any Australian wines on their list," Mr. Wilton said, between the intervals of radish-crunching and olive-munching. "I always believed they thought such a lot of our wines in France, judging by the reports of the experts in the Australian papers."

Hubert shrugged his distorted shoulders. It was the only answer he vouchsafed, and Jack continued plaintively:

"You can't believe a word they say in the papers." Then, after a pause, suddenly changing his tone: "What a devilish lucky thing our mining venture was, when one comes to think of it! Who would have thought, two years ago, that we should be swelling it here in Paris in this way? To think of the fortunes that were lying under the stones of

Tarragunyah all the time we were bursting ourselves riding after those blessed cattle ! Memory *is* a dashed queer thing, anyhow," he continued reflectively, reverting once more to the subject of the Australian appearance of the people seated at the neighbouring table. "I can't for the life of me tell where I've seen that girl before ; but I'll swear I've seen her somewhere. Doesn't she remind you of *anybody*, commander ?"

"I can't say she does," replied Hubert, after he had taken a second and more deliberately critical glance at the occupants of Mrs. Warden's table ; "but the little girl next to her puts me in mind somehow of my youthful days. She's not unlike a Greuze."

Jack was not sure whether a Greuze was a person or an animal, and thought it wise to bring the conversation back to the Australian wine topic, in which he was more sure of his ground. For the next half-hour, therefore, Albury wines, sugar-planting, Chinese labour, Protectionist policy, and the prospects of the Northern Territory, formed fertile and congenial themes of discussion. In the meantime the potage financier, croustades and *tourne dos Rossini*, and all the endless other pompously and fantastically-named delicacies that comprised the Louvre *menu*, were duly brought and disposed of.

At the neighbouring table, the talk, though continuous, had been of a fragmentary and disjointed description. An occasional burst of silvery laughter, childishly joyous and unrestrained, from the little girl with the seraph head, had more than once caused people to turn round in the direction whence it emanated.

It is true that there was nothing to warrant such extravagant mirth, and Mrs. Warden did not join in her children's laughter. She was discussing Bon Marché mantles with the Miss McCready who trimmed her own bonnets ; and if she thought of the young people at all, it was as a parcel of children together. To suppose that Sydney was actually paying court to his little playmate under cover of their noisy merriment was a thing she would never have imagined ; yet in the midst of all her mirth Mamy was per-

fectly aware that Sydney loved her and desired her. Perhaps the feeling was in a measure responsible for her unreasoning laughter, in which there might have been detected a hint of something unstrung and hysterical. The contrast between her own home surroundings and those in which she found her friends, the longing to possess some of the same enjoyments and luxuries as they, without having Sydney attached to them, real liking and pity for Sydney himself, and a loyal aversion to allow him to woo her with no warmer feeling for him in her heart—all these warring emotions required an outlet of some kind. If Mamy had not laughed, she must have cried. A few more years added to her life, and she would probably have acted very differently. It is the first and early ideal of love that holds so lofty a sway, and which it is so hard to dislodge—harder, indeed, than a flesh and blood lover; for it is a creation of the immaterial part of our natures, and we have put into it all that seems to render our individual existences worthy of being projected into a hereafter. Yet, unconsciously to herself, Mamy was being brought nearer to Sydney step by step through the sheer tenacity of his purpose. Do not mathematicians describe two lines that continue to approach each other through infinite space without ever actually meeting? But human hearts cannot act like these mathematical lines. In Hobart Mamy had been fain to promise Sydney that she would engage herself to no other man for a whole year. Two-thirds of the year had already slipped away. No sign of a lover had appeared on the horizon, and Mamy had willingly renewed her promise to Sydney that she would pledge herself to him conditionally for yet another twelvemonth. Sydney had little doubt that at the end of this second year his patience would be finally rewarded. He was not of those whose fancy “lightly turns to thoughts of love,” and he was sure of knowing his own mind. Physiologists, indeed, may maintain that the love of a man for a maid is not called forth by the maid herself, but only by his own spring-time mood made incarnate in her. Lovers of the Sydney Warden type are a refutation of this purely physiological theory of love. The young



man, indeed, had no eyes for any woman save his childhood's sweetheart, and the graces and charms of other maidens were powerless to fire his imagination. As a matter of fact, he had no opportunity of judging, for he never bestowed any attention upon them. Even upon the homeward voyage, during the long trip across the Indian Ocean, when board-ship becomes a very hot-bed of flirtations, and the passengers play at being in love as they watch the phosphorus fly through the foam over the vessel's sides on nights of heat and darkness—even under such influences as these Sydney had remained faithful to the one image he carried in his heart. He would sit in the smoking-room with the elderly card-players while the sound of moonlight dancing was heard on the deck. In the day he would carry his pipe and book to the fo'c's'le, and curl himself up against the bowsprit, far from the madding crowd on the hurricane deck. He was uncouth in the society of ladies, and was conscious of his defect. He did not know what subjects to talk about that might interest them. The only woman with whom he had ever felt entirely at his ease was Mamy, who had introduced herself to his notice in the first instance by aiming a potato at his head. How well he remembered her Amazonian attitude on that occasion, with the flushed little face, and straw-tangled hair, and childish arm uplifted in the act of throwing! Young as he had been at the time, he had felt vaguely that the unconventionality of his first introduction would facilitate his future relations with her. Mamy was likewise the only girl in whose society he had never felt himself hampered by any kind of awkward self-consciousness. It was his delight to picture her running or riding by his side over the sheep-station he intended to purchase in Victoria on his return. For Mamy was not only his fancy in the passional sense: he felt towards her as towards a sister, a mate and a boon companion as well. The side of her character that could not rest satisfied with him for a husband was closed to Sydney. Had he been capable of understanding it, he might have found it easier to win her.

As Mrs. Warden's party prepared to leave the room, Mamy cast a last lingering look around at its varied splendours,

and in so doing her eyes swept over the table where Hubert and his friend were seated. By this means she made the discovery that the blue orbs of the latter were fixed intently upon herself. Jack was so clearly detected in the act of looking his fill, that he shifted his gaze with something of a shame-faced consciousness, though not before Mamy's glance had been involuntarily arrested by his own. He saw her colour and turn her head away, and by looking in the mirror he could follow her progress as she walked out of the room with something of a vacant and wondering look in her eyes that he felt himself responsible for bringing there. She gazed no more at the glories of the *épergne* on the long central table or the dusky glory of the goddesses on the walls. She hardly knew herself whether it was from elation or vexation that her heart beat as she descended the stairs by Sydney's side and passed out into the white light of the Louvre court. She only knew that the worshipful admiration she had seen depicted in the pleasant, sunny, manly face would stamp that face upon her memory for some time to come.

Poor little Mamy! It was not to be expected that in this great overflowing world of Paris she would ever see the face again; but even the fact that it had momentarily impressed itself upon her fancy made her feel that it would be right for her to fortify herself against Eila's pleadings as regarded her attitude towards Sydney. Poor Sydney! It was not his fault if she could not bring herself to care about him in the right way. Rather, it was the fault of her own perverse temperament that placed all kinds of obstacles in the way. Yet how could she consent to bind herself to him for evermore, when the first stranger she ran across, and the most unlike him in appearance, was able to stimulate her imagination as Sydney had never done merely by looking at her?

Mr. Wilton did not speak for a few moments after the party of Australians had disappeared. Apparently he was engrossed in finishing his cigarette and in looking over the list of theatres in the *Figaro*. He made no further allusion to the little girl whom his friend had compared to a Greuze, but studied the paper while Hubert was settling the bill (for

the functions that come under the head of "shepherding" include those of paymaster).

"What shall we do with ourselves this evening?" he said at last with a half-yawn.

Hubert reflected for a moment.

"What's going on at the Français?" he asked.

"The Français!" repeated Jack interrogatively.

"The Français—the Théâtre Français, man! There's no better acting in the world."

"Isn't there?" said Mr. Wilton naïvely. He stroked his blonde moustache with an embarrassed air. "You'll think me a frightful Goth, I know," he added, with a shame-faced laugh; "but I'd rather knock about some of the music-halls to-night. It's better fun. Where does Judic play? And there's a place the fellows used to tell me about—not Mabilles—the Folies—Folies—something—it was called."

"The Folies-Bergère," said Hubert, with a half-contemptuous smile; "but you could never put through a whole evening there."

"Couldn't I? Well, then——" Mr. Wilton picked up the neglected *Figaro* and applied himself once more to a laborious study of its contents. The result of his inspection was to make him exclaim an instant later in a gleeful voice: "Here's a lark! I never heard of such a thing in all my born days! Just listen to this, commander, only don't make fun of my accent—'Prix de Beauté'" (he called it, however, "Botay"). Thereupon he read the announcement referring to the exhibition promised for that evening at the Folies-Fantassin. "From what I can make out," he concluded, "it's going to be a genuine beauty show—the real article, and no deception. Let's go and have a look at it."

But Hubert's face showed little enthusiasm.

"Where is it?" he asked, with an unmistakably discouraging intonation.

"Here, you'd better read it yourself," replied Mr. Wilton, handing him the *Figaro*. "Of course, it may be all a take in, there's no saying; but there's a big sum offered, anyhow."

Hubert made no further comment until he had cast his

eye over the announcement without removing his cigar from his lips. Then he held it in his fingers, and a smile of half-pitying irony flitted across his face.

"Beauty and virtue, too!" he said meaningly. "Thus saith the *Figaro*! A large order truly! but I have no doubt there will be at least as much of the one as of the other. I don't remember any place called the Folies-Fantassin in my day. It must be a kind of second-rate Eden, I imagine—the very place in which to look for a first-class collection of Rosières. You're not really going to be such a fool as to go there, Jack! It's all a hoax—take my word for it."

"I don't care; I want to go!" said Mr. Wilton obstinately; "and what's more, I want you to come too: you might give in this once, commander, and I'll go anywhere you want the rest of the time. But I'd rather you came with me to-night. I won't answer for the consequences if you let me go alone, I tell you."

Hubert smiled a second time—a somewhat grim and bitter smile. The beauty and virtue promised in the bill formed a bait very appropriate to the kind of fish that nibbled at it. Certainly five francs for the stalls and eight francs for a closer inspection of these attractions on the stage itself were not much out of the pockets of two silver-kings; but Hubert regarded them nevertheless as eight francs thrown away. Not so his companion. There was still much that was unsophisticated in Jack's nature: he had spent the best part of his youth hitherto in the Bush, and the feeling of the shearer who thirsts to knock down his cheque in the nearest township was not unknown to him. The feeling was strong upon him to-night, and so evident was his hankering after the café-concert seductions that Hubert said at last, in the tone in which one would humour a child out for a holiday: "Well, if nothing else will content you! Only don't say afterwards that I didn't warn you."

"Oh, it's only for the fun of the thing!" said the young man deprecatingly; he was beginning to feel a little ashamed of his eagerness. "We needn't do more than just

take a look in, you know, and then come away. I dare say it's all humbug, as you say."

Hubert nodded, and the curiously matched pair left the hotel and sauntered through the arcades of the Palais Royal and thence up the comparatively deserted Rue de Richelieu towards the Grands Boulevards, where they seated themselves in front of the Maison Doré and called for an absinthe. The air was becoming a little chilly for outdoor inaction, but the Continental races, who will shudder at the idea of sleeping with their bedroom windows open by a finger's breadth in the warmest weather, think nothing of sitting up to all hours and almost in all seasons in the damp night air. Therefore there were numberless people grouped behind the small tables upon the pavement outside the café. The crowd of pleasure seekers was streaming by with faces illumined and bleached like a harlequin's by the strong electric light. Mr. Wilton found great amusement in watching them pass. Hubert sat back in the shade, with his hump against the wall and his hat over his eyes, paying little attention to Jack's comments.

Besides the theatre-goers and ordinary *flâneurs*, there were the unmistakable family parties from across the Channel who came to a standstill before the brilliantly-illuminated windows of all the chocolate shops and jewellers'; then there were the powdered and perfumed *petites dames*, who, albeit most elegantly attired, were yet abroad with an eye to business; these appeared and reappeared at regular intervals, like the circular processions that pass behind the scenes in the theatre and then emerge again upon the stage; there were also specimens of the real genuine boulevardier, who has an amazing knowledge of the world that lies between the Madeleine and the Vaudeville, but is ignorant as a Hot-tentot of all that lies beyond it. Jack's attention was quite absorbed in watching these varied specimens of his kind defile past him, though I will not answer for it that the eyes of the little girl with the seraph head did not occasionally look out from the smoke-wreaths that went curling up from his second Havana. The pipe was discarded now.

As for Hubert, sitting with his hat over his eyes, his

thoughts were busy in a past in which Jack had no share. To no one in the world had he spoken of the scenes in which he had taken part in the Paris of the siege and the Commune. Looking back upon that time now, he felt as though he had lived two distinct lives, and possessed a distinct personality in each. In the first he had been young, and the enthusiasm of youth for a lofty ideal might have animated his soul had it not been for the oppressive consciousness of his bodily affliction that haunted him. This it was that had poisoned his youth and dried up all the fountains of enthusiasm in his nature. It had made a social and political rebel of him. It had driven him to throw in his cause with whosoever revolted against the established order of things. He had hated the organized army, whence his pitiable deformity excluded him—hated the entire existing social edifice, wherein there seemed no place or scope for one cursed like himself. Under the influence of this hatred he had taken part and lot with the Commune. He had not said to himself, however, in so many words, "I hate my fellow-creatures who are better off than myself, and I will revenge my mischance—my own hard lot in life—upon them!" On the contrary, he had masked his real motives even to himself, and said (believing that he was sincere in saying so), "I love my fellow-creatures who are worse off than myself. I will help them to equalize lots by the exercise of justifiable violence. *A bas les bourgeois ! and Place au soleil for the oppressed !*"

The Commune, however, had been stamped out by the hoofs of MacMahon's chargers, and Hubert was obliged to own that even if his impulses had been pure and unalloyed his action had been unwise and blamable. From the Spencerian and utilitarian standpoint, which judges by results alone, it was without a plea, for it had ended in ruin and defeat. It was true that when he had thrown himself so passionately into the cause he had not foreseen the bloody issue of the experiment. He had fought for a change for the same reason as his fellow-combatants—to wit, that he was miserable and discontented. Only whereas their ills were remediable, his was incurable. An unexpected inheritance would have solved the question for the majority of

his colleagues, while for himself Hubert had money and to spare.

He had paid dearly for the incorporation of his own personal embitterment with the holy cause of freedom. The accusation that he had been taken red-handed on the dreadful day of massacre and carnage that closed the Commune administration had sufficed for his instant conviction. It was not a time at which solitary cases could be very carefully investigated, and perhaps he had been lucky after all to escape being shot down in the streets, as had been the fate of many an innocent man, woman, and child, during that awful time. He had been sent to New Caledonia, and upon leaving it had assumed another name that very much resembled his own. His own was identified with failure and disgrace, for though *patriote* may be a better-sounding title than *déporté*, it was still as a *déporté* that he figured on the prison-lists of Noumea, and he who had been ready—ostensibly—to shed his blood for the liberty of his fellow-creatures, had been now deprived by the law of his own. When the amnesty came he did not rush back, like his fellow-communists, to the *mère patrie*. England was at least as bound up with his early associations as France, and his revolutionary ardour, that had an egoistic foundation, had had time to cool. Putting himself and his affliction out of the question, he was not better satisfied with the conditions under which human societies are organized than before; but the futility of seeking to transform them by violent means in one generation had been brought home to him.

His mother was dead. He believed he had had some share in breaking her heart, and this to a man with French blood in his veins is one of the most appalling reflections that can well be imagined. The actual organization of the Republic, with the mild Grévy at its head, he looked upon as a mere compromise; but what was human life, or, indeed, life altogether, but a compromise? Instead of playing the part of a disturbing element, and kicking against the pricks, he would go into the desert and hide there. His sister had entered the Order of Carmelites, and was to all intents and purposes dead to him and to the world. He

gathered together such moneys as he could procure by the sale through an agent of his small property in France, and took up land on the New South Wales border of Queensland. Fortune had not smiled upon him at first, and what with droughts and bad seasons, Tarragunyah station appeared an unlucky investment, until the afore-described silver discovery gave to things quite another aspect.

Hubert Merrilies' name had been little heard of before this great event which made Tarragunyah a household word in Australia. The buyers of Tarragunyah wool, or of cattle with the Tarragunyah brand, hardly knew of the existence of the misanthropic hunchback who directed operations in the background. Even the vague rumours of his enforced association with New Caledonia interested nobody after a time. He had known Jack's father professionally through an illness that had detained him three months in a Sydney hotel soon after his arrival in Australia, and had made an exception in the lad's favour to his rule of allowing no gentleman-loafer, or gentleman in any other capacity, to show his face at Tarragunyah. Jack showed his appreciation of the favour by proving himself an energetic and useful aid, and an unfailingly cheerful companion. Hubert was an oracle in the lad's eyes. A certain sideway shrug of his protruding shoulder had an almost magical effect in carrying instant conviction or refutation to Jack's mind. Even this evening Mr. Wilton had been almost "choked off," as he would have called it himself, by Hubert's attitude with regard to the Folies-Fantassin exhibition. He had held his ground, nevertheless, for the matter was one which really aroused his curiosity. He had seen cattle and sheep shows by the score; he had heard of cat-shows and baby-shows; but an exhibition of professional beauties, whose attractions were to be reviewed and appraised in cold blood, was a decided novelty. It would be something new to tell the fellows about out in Australia, and now that it was settled there could be no motive for going back upon it.

Thus argued Jack with himself as, somewhere about ten o'clock that evening, he left the café and took his seat by



Hubert's side in a passing carriage hailed upon the boulevard. The streets that had seemed so steep and tortuous to Eila, making her way up them with trembling knees and a failing heart, were quickly traversed in a cab. Jack was still secretly nursing the opinion that this was the kind of spree he liked as he followed Hubert down the narrow entrance to the turnstile where the tickets were sold.

"Take one for the stage," he whispered, as he waited an instant by Hubert's side while the latter was paying for the places, "then I can go up and sling 'em some parley-voo, you know."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### EILA'S ORDEAL.

UPON entering the theatre, Hubert perceived that his prediction that the Folies-Fantassin would prove to be a kind of second-class Eden was verified. Besides the pit and stalls, there was but one gallery or dress-circle, which widened out in the rear into a carpeted space where the spectators sat as in a café before small tables, at which they might drink and smoke at their ease. The entire theatre would not have contained more than a thousand people. There were private boxes under the gallery, of which the occupant was generally a lady, either alone or accompanied by a duenna. In either case she was sure to be dressed in the height of the reigning fashion, and to wear also a fashion-book complexion. The decorations of the Folies-Fantassin were Moorish, and they might have been reproached with an exaggeration of local colour in respect of their want of cleanliness. Now, the shade that gathers upon real mouch-arabia, upon alabaster or enamel, in the genuine East, is one thing, and that which disfigures painted imitations of the same is another. A little less local colour in this respect would have greatly improved the appearance of the Folies-Fantassin, which, to do it justice, was not otherwise inartistically arranged and devised.

There was an acrobatic performance going on as Hubert and his friend entered. A female trapezist was hanging by her two pink-silk-encased legs to a horizontal bar, swinging from the roof of the stage. With her head downwards and her muscular arms extended in the same direction, she was holding another female acrobat by the hands, swinging her slowly backwards and forwards like a pendulum in the void. There was no net, and the problem that thrilled the spectators all down their backs, giving them their full money's worth of "sensation," was how the held-up woman was to escape breaking her neck. To get into her perilous position had been comparatively easy, but to get out of it was another matter. After several long slow swings backwards and forwards, she solved the problem by raising herself at the cost of an effort that caused the muscles in her arms to rise like hillocks, throwing her legs meanwhile around the waist of the trapezist who was holding her. The strain to which the former was subjected was plainly and painfully written to the gaze of those below in her pink-silk calves, and more than one feminine spectator turned away her head with an involuntary "Misericorde!" as the interlocked bodies of the trapezists oscillated in the void.

"By George!" exclaimed Mr. Wilton, "they're plucked uns, those two, and no mistake!" For the next few moments he forgot all about the purpose for which he had come, in the interest of watching the trapezists, who, by way of what is vulgarly termed "piling up the agony," went through two or three elaborately-feigned, blood-curdling escapes, before they swung themselves into the comparatively secure position of a seat upon the horizontal bar. A café concert-song followed next, sung, or rather declaimed, by an imitator of Paulus, with a clean-shaved face and a marvelously mobile mouth that conveyed volumes of meaning in its faintest twist. To translate the words to Mr. Wilton's satisfaction was not an easy task, for they were made up of a kind of argot that had not been in vogue in Hubert's time. After this song had been encored, and the audience had clamoured for "*Le voilà! Nicholas! Ah! ah! ah!*" the curtain fell, and Jack amused himself by endeavouring to

decipher the meaning of the various advertisements that covered it. He was laboriously spelling out the words beneath the effigy of a woman in a cap, holding a carefully stiffened infant in her arms, when the curtain was drawn up a second time, and the audience beheld ten seats arranged in a half-moon, fronting the stage, whereon ten ladies were ensconced, each in a costume of a more or less fancy description. At the same moment the orchestra struck up the waltz from "Faust," and a Bengal light being adroitly caused to flare up behind the stage, the young women were bathed in a rose-coloured atmosphere that greatly enhanced their charms.

"What a lark!" Jack Wilton said again. He had screwed the opera-glass he had hired at the door to the required focus, and was sweeping it carefully along the range of human exhibits, as he was accustomed to do when following the horses he had backed in a race. "I guess you were about right though, commander," he added in disappointed tones. "I can't spot more than one or two good-looking girls in the lot!"

"There is only one," said Hubert indifferently.

He made use of no opera-glass, having eyes that for accuracy and sweep of vision could almost have vied with those of the black-fellows on his station of Tarragunyah, but kept his gaze fixed upon the central figure of the group, whom he had immediately singled out from the fact that it seemed to bear an entirely distinct personality of its own.

The competing beauties had been arranged in crescent order by Monsieur Massé himself. This second-rate manager of a second-rate music-hall had dreamed in his youthful days of leaping into fame by painting a fifty-foot square canvas for the Salon, portraying Jezebel's doom. The jury, however, had refused to be impressed by Jezebel's "defenestration," and Monsieur Massé had turned actor in disgust. He retained, however, a certain experience in the combining of colours, and had himself designed the costumes for the fair candidates, as well as the particular arrangement of hair, either real or false, that was to accompany these. He had decided at a glance who was fitted to assume the rôle of

a Sultana, and who might pass muster as Salammbo. Over Eila's costume he had pondered longer than the others, being perplexed, not so much upon the score of what would suit her, as of what would suit her best. His imagination had run riot for a while among Cleopatras, Byzantine virgins, and Venuses; but finally he had decided in favour of the disguise in which she appeared to Hubert's eyes to-night. She had made no protest on the score of its appropriateness; had it been a shirt of Nessus instead of a leopard-skin, it would have been all one to her. Her resolution once taken, she had made up her mind to accept all the consequences it might entail. Thus it was in the special dress devised for her by Monsieur Massé that she was on view this evening behind the footlights, like "poor Lorraine-Loree," for all the world to see. Dress is, perhaps, too elaborate a term to be applied to her attire, which was none other than that of a mythological Bacchante, as interpreted by the canons of art that ruled at the Folies-Fantassin. An imitation leopard-skin, with properly jagged edges, though exquisitely supple in texture, was girded round her body to below the knee, leaving disclosed, as in the dress of Mignon at the opera, ostensibly bare feet, modelled like those of a Greek statue. The neck and the whole of one polished arm and shoulder were bared in their marble whiteness. A mass of half-curling, half-waving dark hair, streaked with warm gleams of gold, streamed over her back and hips. The head was crowned with red-splashed vine-leaves that formed a narrow circlet round the temples, while a pendent tendril mingled its tiny sprouts with the coils of loosened hair. In her right hand she held an antique cup half filled with a red liquid, which she had been instructed to hold aloft invitingly at a specified bar of the waltz from "Faust." Faithful to tradition as her pose and her attire might appear, Eila's expression was powerless to render the true Bacchante suggestion. Her look was rather that of a person whose mind has soared to some far-away region, and is no longer in touch with its material surroundings.

We all know what it is, when thinking deeply upon some abstract subject, to find that our eyes are fixed upon vacancy.

The gaze of a person looking at nothing, or of one looking inwardly rather than outwardly, seems to remove him far from those about him; and so entirely was this impression conveyed by Eila's eyes to-night, that all the efforts of the spectators to intercept her glance seemed to be in vain. The colour in her cheeks, despite the tinge of rouge that had been applied to them, was but faint; yet the line of her lips was a vivid crimson. It was not long before the Fatimas, Sultanas, Gitanas, and other cigar-box beauties to the right and left of her, were forgotten. After a very few minutes, all eyes and all glasses were directed towards the beautiful Bacchante sitting steadfast on her simulated rock in the centre of the stage. Her expression puzzled and disconcerted the audience. "C'est une pose!" Hubert heard a man next to him say. But *was* it a pose, or was she acting unconsciously in a kind of hypnotic trance? He fixed his eyes upon her with a searching look—such a look as had enabled him, in times gone by, to distinguish a crouching native from a charred tree-stump in the far north of Australia (surely one of the hardest feats that eyes of white man ever accomplished); but no sign of a pose could he detect. The red lips were compressed as though they held a secret that none might learn—a secret too distressful to be told; the far-away look, if it were simulated, was yet such a look as a painter might have chosen for a Joan of Arc rather than for a music-hall *cabotine*. The look that a soldier led forth to be shot might wear when the ring of muskets closes round him was what it most suggested to Hubert's mind—a soldier who had made up his mind, Heaven knew at what cost, to die bravely without allowing his eyes to be bandaged, yet could not bring himself to direct them towards the instruments of torture and death that were levelled at him. The expressions of the remaining women were all marked by a certain family resemblance. Whether simply brazen, or wearing a feigned coyness, they were alike stamped with the same brand. Those who had good teeth assumed a mirthless smile.

After some ten minutes had elapsed, the holders of red tickets among the spectators were allowed to mount upon the stage, which was speedily filled to overflowing.

Like the fair and legendary Eve when she first perceived that she was without raiment in the Garden of Eden, so felt Eila in her Bacchante costume in the midst of the staring crowd. The glare of the gas, the heat of the footlights, the atmosphere reeking with cigar-smoke and patchouli, her own overwhelming emotion and fear, perhaps, too, the fact that a diet of indiarubber bread and much diluted bone soup does not conduce to physical strength—all these causes combined were beginning to produce their effect. A curious dizziness was creeping over her, a sense of drowsy torpor she had never felt before. The people and the lights in front of her grew blurred and indistinct; the red points of the cigars seemed to trace fiery circles upon a dark background; her head bent forward, lower and lower, while her cheeks grew whiter and whiter. The last thing she was conscious of was that her face seemed to have grown suddenly cold; an instant later everything around her was dark. Sight and hearing were alike gone. She had swooned away into unreachableness, infinite night.

Whence she came back a few minutes afterwards, when her eyes again took cognizance of their earthly surroundings, she never knew. She could not even think of it without a shudder, for it seemed to her as though she had returned from never-ending blank space, and that she had been lost for a time in a black and limitless void. The feeling was one to be felt rather than described. Gradually, however, the perception of the tangible objects around her returned. She found herself lying back upon a bench with a cushion under her head. Her forehead and temples were wet, and there was a strong odour of eau-de-Cologne and brandy in the air. Someone standing by her side, who hardly seemed like a real personage at first, but rather like a continuation of her dream, was trying to keep back the crowd that pressed around her.

"Il lui faut de l'air!" she heard him say in imperative tones. "C'est surtout de l'air qu'il lui faut!"

Next he addressed himself to a fair-moustached youth, standing tall and shy by his side, and this time he spoke in English.

"Keep them off if you can," he said; "these brutes are stifling her amongst them."

The sound of the English voice acted like a charm upon the prostrate Bacchante. She made an effort to raise herself from her recumbent position, while a warm flush of shame mounted to her temples. Hubert saw the attempt, and immediately came to her assistance. As she raised herself to her feet with the aid of his outstretched hands, she essayed to thank him.

"Oh, you are English!" she said eagerly, in a voice that trembled, in spite of all her efforts to command it. "I heard you speaking just now. Oh, do help me! I want so to get away from this place! I am afraid I did a very foolish thing in coming. It was only to earn a little money for them at home, indeed, and I thought it would be a kind of tableau vivant—nothing more—and that I might come away directly the curtain fell."

She was talking rapidly, almost incoherently. The horror of anybody supposing that she had come there with another motive than the real one was more than she could endure. What would Reginald say if he could see her now? Instinctively she covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

Hubert answered her gravely, but not unkindly.

"Don't distress yourself. You can leave when you like. Are you"—he hesitated—"are you quite alone?"

"Yes, quite. They don't know where I am at home. They haven't the least idea, and I would not have them know for anything. Oh, please, do you think I might get away now?"

She looked up at him imploringly. It was, perhaps, the first time in his life that Hubert de Merle had been appealed to thus by a woman for help and protection. Women as a rule shrank away from him. Even the most considerate tortured him unconsciously by the efforts they made not to seem aware of his deformity. He did not know to what an extent his own morbid susceptibility was responsible for their attitude, nor how it reacted upon all those with whom he came into contact, rendering it impossible for them to feel at ease with him. However this might be, to play the

part of a rescuing knight to a beautiful damsel in distress was a thing undreamed of in his experience. He was reassured at the same time by feeling that the Bacchante who sought his assistance really paid no heed to his appearance. She was evidently prepared to look upon him in the light of a deliverer, and as such she gave no thought to his "questionable shape." These reflections, which passed with lightning speed through Hubert's brain, gave him such unwonted assurance that he exclaimed cordially :

"Get away ? Of course you can ! Who has any right to stop you ? Will you take my arm through the crowd and let me see you safely out ?"

Eila jumped at the offer, metaphorically speaking, for, in point of fact, her knees were trembling from fatigue and agitation ; but she could not make her escape in the Bacchante disguise, with no other head-covering than a wreath of artificial vine-leaves.

"I must leave my costume here," she explained, "it is not my own ; and my other things are in a room behind the scenes."

Hubert offered to conduct her to the dressing-room, and wait for her while she put on her every-day attire. Their conversation had lasted but a few seconds. The crowd that pressed around them, without gathering its purport, was only aware that an understanding had been come to between the beautiful Bacchante and the deformed hunchback. Already an audible whisper of "*La Belle et la Bête*," accompanied by a cynical laugh, had reached Eila's ears, and made her heart sink for her companion.

But Hubert was quite unheeding. He turned to the fair-moustached youth, who had remained by his side, silently watching the interview with a countenance in which pity, admiration, bewilderment, and doubt were all naïvely expressed, and said imperiously :

"Call a cab, will you, Wilton, and have it waiting outside when I bring this lady out."

Jack disappeared in an instant. But it was one thing to order a cab, and another to reach it. Monsieur Massé, the director, incited by the holders of the red tickets, who had



paid their money for the express purpose of forming a closer acquaintanceship with the candidates for the prize of beauty on exhibition at the Folies-Fantassin, was less amenable. A formal resistance was made to the Bacchante's exit, and it needed all Hubert's knowledge of his language and of his countrymen to enable him to carry on single-handed the battle in her behalf. He almost thought at one moment that he should have to attempt some feat of the kind in which Ouida's heroes excel, to clear a passage for her.

She stood meanwhile, trembling and very pale, by his side. It was by dint eventually of representing himself as a friend and "parent" of mademoiselle's—an inspiration of the moment wherein he little guessed that there was any actual substratum of truth—that he succeeded in leading her away. She clung gratefully to his arm, and for once Hubert almost forgot that he occupied among his fellow-men the place that Vulcan occupied among the gods when they derided him in Olympia. The dressing-rooms of the Folies-Fantassin, no larger than cupboards, were in the rear of the stage. By dint of inquiries on the way, he was enabled to lead the Bacchante thither without obstruction. Before she disappeared behind the shabby curtain that screened the cabin she recognised as her own, Eila paused. There was evidently something on her mind that she longed yet feared to communicate.

"I can't thank you enough," she said, with a quaver in her voice; "but—but I hardly know how to say it—only I did hope so much that perhaps one of the prizes—there is a second one, you know, of eighty pounds—might have been awarded to me. It was only in that hope I came; and how am I ever to find out if I go away now? Perhaps they will say I have forfeited it."

Her tones faltered. Hubert reassured her once more.

"I'll find out at once for you if you like," he said, "only you had better wait here until I come back."

The cordiality of his tone, the ready courtesy of his manner, in which he seemed to take it for granted that he must treat her as a gentleman is wont to treat a woman and a lady, were indescribably grateful to her. She thanked him

by her look, more eloquently than by her words, and twenty minutes later—a very long twenty minutes they seemed, for before the first ten had elapsed she was already clad in her ordinary attire, and the Bacchante leopard-skin (not her own property this) had been handed over to the dresser who claimed it—she heard his voice again.

A terrible misgiving, a mighty panic, had assailed her as she waited alone. What if he should have gone away and left her to her fate? How should she ever find the courage to face that terrifying crowd again, and try to discover for herself whether she had gained a prize?

Her face was pale with apprehension as she emerged from behind the curtain at the sound of Hubert's voice. He could not refrain from taking a sharp and rapid survey of her as she came out into the narrow descending corridor, deserted by everyone save a dresser and a scene-shifter, who cast curious glances in his direction. He motioned her to walk a little farther down the passage, where they might talk at their ease. She understood that he had come to tell her the result of his self-imposed mission, and followed him in trembling expectation. One swift glance had satisfied him that she was not a whit less pretty clothed and in her right mind than before—that is to say, in a shabby ulster and low, round straw hat, instead of in a leopard-skin and vine-leaves; and there was assuredly something infinitely pitiful in the air of over-weening anxiety with which she turned toward him and mutely questioned his face. Among the lies which the recording angel effaces with a tear, I think Hubert de Merle's lie that night may be considered deserving of a place. What ulterior purpose the director of the Folies-Fantassin might have had in promising a five-thousand-franc prize, which he certainly could have had no intention of paying, Mr. de Merle did not stop to consider.

From the investigations he made during those long twenty minutes while Eila waited for him in the so-called dressing-room, he discovered that the appearance of the human exhibits upon the stage was merely the first step in a speculation of a Circassian slave-mart order. Not that the young ladies who competed for the prize could be in any

way compared to ignorant helpless slaves. They knew perfectly well what they were about when they lent their willing co-operation to the speculation in question. They considered that if the director of the Folies-Fantassin had an eye to his own benefit in the transaction, the opportunity he afforded them of advertising their attractions was a direct benefit to *them*, and they were the more indifferent to the bait held out in the shape of a prize that they looked upon the Prix de Beauté competition as a means and not as an end. This was why, when Hubert went to interview the director, he was received with a series of shrugs that entirely and successfully evaded dealing with the point in question. All that could be gathered was that *ces dames* were altogether content with the conditions imposed upon them; that they had unlimited confidence in their director; that the result of the votes could not possibly be known until the ladies had afforded the jury more ample opportunities of forming an opinion; that the *charmante demoiselle* who had had the misfortune to be indisposed must present herself again before she could hope to obtain a favourable verdict, and that one of the conditions attached to the exhibition was that the portrait of the winner of the prize should be exhibited in all the shop-windows, with her signature.

Hubert did not wait to hear more. He made up his mind instantly. He went back to the Bacchante, and in answer to the eager inquiry he read in her eyes—for she was too overcome to speak—he replied, with well-disguised assurance: “Well! I have good news for you. It seems I must congratulate you upon having won the first prize. Five thousand francs, is not that it?”

In yielding to the quixotic impulse that led him upon the spur of the moment to fabricate this tremendous falsehood, Hubert was not prepared for the immediate consequences that ensued. The Bacchante—a Bacchante no longer, but a poorly-dressed, sweet-visaged young woman, with most eloquent eyes—broke down completely at the news. Leaning against the stained wall of the narrow corridor, dimly lighted by sparse jets of flickering gas, she had covered her face with her handkerchief, and was weeping

into it with the abandonment of a child who has been unduly punished. The convulsive sobbing, that could not be repressed, told of a previous strain of cruel intensity. What must she not have suffered before she had nerved herself to go through the terrible ordeal of this evening? The anguish of pent-up shame, as well as the bliss of a great deliverance, found expression in her tears. Hubert allowed her to have her cry out in silence. He did not regret his lie of a moment ago. It was God's truth, if not the stage-director's, that he had uttered, for fairer than she he had never seen—not on the ignoble stage of the Folies-Fantassin alone, but in the whole wide world. But how should he carry his fiction to its completion without detection? How make it appear that the five thousand francs he intended to bestow upon the Bacchante (upon the Bacchante?—no, a thousand times no! but upon this poor weeping child by his side) had been sent to her by the administration of the theatre instead of by himself? Hubert was a man of ready resources. The difficulty had hardly presented itself before he had concocted a plan for meeting it in the short interval during which Eila was wiping her eyes and framing her broken apologies.

"Don't mind!" he said; "it is not to be wondered at if you are a little unnerved. This is no place for you to be in, you know."

His manner was elder-brotherly and kind in the extreme, just such a manner as the Beast might have had when the distracted Beauty was weeping in his enchanted palace for her home.

Eila hung her head. "I know—it isn't," she said, catching her breath painfully; "but the money—was so badly needed—you can't think! Things happened we could never have expected, and now we are saved." A look of almost incredulous joy illumined her countenance. "Only it seems too good to be true. I can hardly believe it even now. Would you mind telling it me just once again?"

"Telling you what?" When Hubert was amused, his face lost its expression of sullen defiance, and became human again. "That you are to receive five thousand francs for being the 'fairest of the fair'? I have told you that

already. What a sceptical person you are! But I suppose you want me to give you the details? Well, then, the money is to be sent you in a registered letter to-morrow, as you did not choose to stay and receive it in public. Only you must be at home to receive it. I got all the particulars upon the score of my being a 'parent,' you remember. You need not have the least uneasiness about the matter, I assure you."

Eila's face, which had been very bright at the outset of his address, suddenly fell.

"Oh," she cried, in alarmed tones, "I never gave them my address! I refused to give it on purpose. How could they say they would send the money, not knowing where I was to be found? Oh, *what* shall I do?"

Hubert's presence of mind was equal to the occasion.

"To begin with, don't lose your head," he laughed. The excessive composure of his manner had a tranquillizing effect. "They knew you would send for the money if you did not receive it; but it would be more business-like to leave your address with the director. I will take you to him, if you like, at once; or—no—wait a minute. I should be glad to spare you another meeting with him. Supposing I were to take a message for you instead? You had better not go into the crowd again, for your own sake. They were going to dance as I came away; at least, a lady was going to perform the can-can. Had you not better put your name and address down in writing"—he took out his pocket-book, and extracted a blank leaf and a pencil, which he handed to her—"and let me take it for you to the manager? I will give you my own card by-and-by. I am staying at the Hôtel du Louvre, and I will see that you have your due, I promise you."

He said these words with an air of such calm assurance that Eila's courage returned. She essayed to find words in which to express her gratitude; but her wet lashes (the comeliness of her face was proof against even the unbecoming process of tear-shedding) said more than her phrases. Hubert had the intense gratification of feeling that she trusted him completely. Why, indeed, should she doubt

him? In obedience to his instructions, she wrote her name upon the paper he had given her, holding it against the wall for that purpose. She attached no prefix to it, but wrote simply, in a somewhat schoolboy hand, the words, "Eila Frost," with her address beneath. As she handed the paper to her companion, he glanced instinctively at the name, and immediately noticed that there was no indication as to whether she were wife or maid. He concluded she must be the latter—a conclusion to which her air of extreme youth, and generally *unmarried* aspect, seemed also to point.

It was wonderful, Eila thought, how quickly he accomplished this second mission as compared with the first. Perhaps, she reflected further, her brain was in too great a whirl to allow of her estimating time properly. He might have been away, after all, longer than she supposed. The wonderful, wonderful and most wonderful news he had brought her seemed to put all other thoughts out of her head. When he did return, nevertheless, she could not refrain from interrogating him eagerly once more with her eyes. Hubert understood the look, and smiled reassuringly.

"What! not convinced yet? I give you my word it is all right. The whole business is sealed, and you may sleep on your two ears, as they say here. Tell yourself that tomorrow afternoon by four o'clock the money will be delivered to you at the address you gave me. Are you ready to come away now? My friend will be wondering what has become of us all this time."

Eila murmured some words to the effect that she was quite ready, and inexpressibly grateful. It was necessary to have recourse to an *ouvreuse*, after all, with a ghoul-like face and pink-rouged cheeks that matched unwholesomely with her ribbons, to find the way out through the network of passages behind the theatre.

With a two-franc acknowledgment, the woman went away contented, smirking, and Eila and her protector found themselves on the pavement without, where the fair-moustached young man was walking up and down, smoking a third cigar to while away the time. There was a slight, gray drizzle, to which he seemed entirely indifferent; but Eila

noticed that the white glazed hat of the driver on the box of the carriage in waiting was wet and shiny.

"Thanks, old fellow," Hubert said to his friend, without apologizing, however, for keeping him waiting. "Are you going into that place again, or shall I find you at the Louvre in another hour? I am going to see this lady safe to her own door first."

"All right," replied Mr. Wilton, in the same natural tones. "You'll find me in the smoking-room, I expect, if you want me for anything before you turn in. I hope you are feeling better?" he added, addressing himself to the *ci-devant* Bacchante, and lifting his hat as she hurried past him to the carriage.

Eila uttered a timid "Thank you, much better!" from behind her drawn-down veil, and Mr. Wilton stood for a moment looking after the carriage as it drove away with Mr. de Merle and the Bacchante. He did not make any comment upon the proceeding. The boss was the boss, and as such could do no wrong, however perplexing the fact of his absconding with a vine-crowned damsel from the stage of the Folies-Fantassin might appear to the young man's thinking in connection with his age and personality.

Eila, meanwhile, was feeling all the relief of leaving the scene of her martyrdom behind her. Overcome by the emotions she had been through, she leaned back in the carriage by the side of her self-constituted friend without uttering a word. The vehicle was of the much-worn, springless, clattering, battered type that is still to be met with among the *petites voitures* in the neighbourhood of the Gare St. Lazare, and neither of the occupants spoke until they had been jolted down the descending streets to the lull of the asphalted boulevard and smooth Rue Richelieu. Then Eila awoke from her reverie, and addressed herself to her companion:

"What should I have done if you had not been there tonight, I wonder? I never fainted before, and it seemed just as though I were dying." She shuddered. "The thing that seemed to bring me back to life in the end was hearing you tell your friend in English to keep the crowd away. You

can't imagine what a comfort the English voice and the English words seemed to bring. Still, even now" (at this point her tones grew somewhat diffident) "I don't know whether you are English or not. I made sure you were when I heard you first, but afterwards, when you spoke to the *ouvreuse*, you seemed to be quite French."

Hubert uttered a short laugh. His laugh, as well as his voice, had a pleasant ring. A *tête-à-tête* in the dark with a mysterious and beautiful young woman, who was also as good a counterpart of Psyche in respect of her outward appearance as one could hope to find in this world of imperfections, was very nearly a realization of the fanciful dream of his earlier years. Behind the kindly veil of night he felt no longer at a disadvantage. He could even talk of himself without infusing an unconscious inflexion of scorn and bitterness into his words. He was partly French and partly English, he informed young Mrs. Frost, and he had had a kind of alternate French and English bringing up, which accounted for his familiarity with both languages.

"We have French blood, too," exclaimed Eila, in a tone of childish pride, when she had heard him to the end. "My grandmother—our mother's mother—was French, or half French, at least; and her father was a pure Frenchman."

"Were you born in France?" asked Hubert.

"No; in Tasmania."

The words were uttered with the accompaniment of an involuntary sigh. Hubert could not know the multitude of sad and tender thoughts with which the name of her birth-place was linked. Cowa and Reginald! home and peace! love and security! The vision of the far-away haven in the land of her birth rose clear and distinct before her mind. A morning in spring was breaking over it at this moment, and Reginald, who was probably walking back from his morning swim, might be looking across the hills towards the white cottage on the heights, and thinking of her. What would he say if he could have followed her in an invisible coat this evening? How should she ever be able to act up to her solemn pledge that she would tell him, not only everything that befell her, but everything she contemplated



doing, concealing nothing ? Supposing she had kept her promise literally, what could he have done but suffer ? And did not recent events prove that she had done well to keep her counsel ? If she had consulted him about her project of exhibiting herself before carrying it out, he would have moved heaven and earth to make her abandon it, to say nothing of ruining himself to send her assistance.

Hubert interrupted her mournful reflections by saying :

“That is rather a curious coincidence. My grandmother was French too ; and you and I are compatriots in another sense as well, for I have lived a great deal in Australia. How long is it since you left Tasmania ?”

“Hardly eight months,” was the mournful reply ; “and we would give anything to be back there.”

As the latter remark seemed to pave the way for gaining a little more information of a personal character, Hubert put a few questions, by which he elicited the main facts connected with the migration of the Clares to Europe. He learned under what conditions the great enterprise had been undertaken ; how the family had set out on their travels with insufficient means, and even with less experience, and what the consequences had been. Eila did not conceal the fact that they had been reduced to dire straits, advancing it rather as a plea by which to condone her rash experiment of this evening. The strangeness of confiding the family history to a total stranger, of whose very name she was ignorant, did not occur to her until afterwards. As the sage old saw says, “Circumstances alter cases.” If it had befallen her to be shipwrecked upon a desert island, and if Hubert had suddenly emerged from a grotto, like Caliban, whom he might very well have personated, and had offered her his assistance, she would certainly not have thought of asking him his antecedents before telling him of her plight. His human kinship would have been enough, and more than enough, to warrant her confidence. Now, as regarded her adventure of this evening, she had felt, in a certain sense, quite as forlorn and stranded as though she had suffered actual shipwreck, as though, indeed, the Folies-Fantassin, in lieu of being a noisy music-hall, in a noisy street, in the

heart of a noisy city, had been the veriest surf-washed rock in the whole desolate Atlantic. The hand that had been stretched out to rescue her had been none the less a saving one that it had reached her across a crowd of her fellow-creatures instead of across the angry waves. It seemed quite natural to her that she should continue to cling to it now. That in coming to her help her companion had been actuated by pure and chivalrous motives she had taken for granted from the outset. Perhaps, if he had been a handsome youth instead of an ungainly and hairy hunchback, she would have spoken with more reserve. As the case stood now, she felt instinctively that the best way of proving her gratitude, and of showing him tacitly that she understood and appreciated the unselfishness of his kindness, was to answer his questions fully and trustingly.

Nevertheless, the situation was an unusual one. Hubert looked out more than once to see the direction the cab might be taking. For the first time in his life he was not inclined to quarrel with the crawling pace of the *voiture à l'heure*. Sometimes he failed to find out the bearings. The soft gloom of the November night obscured the light from the gay lamps, and the moon that Eila had watched from the top of the omnibus on the way to Montmartre was hidden behind dark clouds. It was not always easy to speak coherently, owing to the jolting; but Hubert found occasion to comment wonderingly in his own mind upon the soft refinement of the Bacchante's voice, which was pitched in a key that could not fail to be pleasing to sensitive ears. As the white stream from the electric light flashed into the cab on their way across the Place du Carrousel, it illuminated Eila's profile for an instant's space, and brought back the impression of her face to Hubert's mind. What a purely-modelled, innocent-looking face it was! a little pale and tired, but so confiding and youthful withal. Married? Surely not! There were no married lines in the virginal contour of the features, or in the girlish, though bountifully moulded, figure. How was it possible that such a type should have been discoverable in the place where he had found it this evening, among such surroundings and in such

company? He remembered his own ironical suggestion, that they should search for a Rosière among the candidates for the prize of beauty. Perhaps this young woman was only acting the part of an *ingénue*, after all; but if so, she was the most consummate mistress of her art he had ever encountered. Whatever the truth might be, her manner was perfect. It was so simple and straightforward; there was such an utter absence of anything resembling pose or coquetry that it commanded involuntary respect. But how had she come to accept his escort so readily? Hubert did not know whether he was to regard her conduct in this respect as eminently flattering or the reverse. The point about which he felt most curious, as to whether she were married or single, was just the one upon which she had given him no enlightenment; but he thought he could gather from her answers that his impression of her being unmarried was correct. She spoke of mother, sisters, and brothers, but made no mention of a husband; and she could not, as he judged, be more than twenty or thereabouts.

"What put it into your head to go to that place this evening?" he asked her abruptly, after she had given him an outline of the family history. "You can't have had any idea of the risks you were running."

There was a pause, then:

"I thought of nothing but how I might earn a little money," Eila answered humbly. "It will be two months before the next remittance comes from Tasmania. They won't let us have it earlier, and even then it will be terribly little, for we drew in advance all they would let us have to pay for our passages. As we are strangers in Paris, there was not a soul to whom I could turn for help, and mother's illness was the last straw. I had to pay away at once the little that was left, and there was none to go on with. It was like a horrible nightmare, to come to such a pass all in so short a time. There has not even been enough to buy bread lately; and I could think of nothing. Even if we had sold all we had in the world, it would only have helped us to struggle on for a very little longer; and no one in the family knew that there was no money left. It is I who have

the responsibility of laying it out and keeping house upon it since mother's illness, and I could never have believed it would have melted away as it did. Just when matters were becoming desperate, I happened to see the Prix de Beauté competition announced in the *Petit Journal*. I did not think it was a thing to be taken seriously at first, but I went to see about it, all the same, as a kind of forlorn hope. Even when I found it was a *bonâ-fide* competition, and everything was arranged, I did not guess what the reality would be like. I had an idea it would be like figuring in a kind of tableau vivant"—this was the euphemism behind which Eila had sheltered herself from the beginning—"and I have played in tableaux vivants often when we were children in the happy old days in Hobart. I could not have dreamed that it would be as dreadful as it was."

She bent her head. The recollection of the eyes and pince-nez of the man who had offered her "chevaux et voiture" rose before her, and her cheeks burned in the dark.

"You did not have to go through any preliminary rehearsals, then?" Hubert asked.

"No. I was only shown where my seat was to be on the stage. I had to see the director once or twice. He looks a hateful man, but he was really not unkind. He treated me very politely. He said I need only come on the night of the performance, but that I must wear the dress he ordered. He sent me to a woman who makes theatrical costumes, and when I got to the theatre to-night I found someone waiting with my dress ready to put on."

"They wanted you to be photographed in it, you know," observed Hubert dryly, "to stick in the shop-windows."

"To be photographed? Who said so?" cried Eila in tones of unfeigned terror. "I would not let them photograph me for anything in the world. Why, I never would have gone if I had thought there were any danger of being recognised again."

"I am afraid that is asking rather much of the thousand odd spectators who gazed at you to-night. But you need not give your consent to be photographed, if you object to it so strongly. Perhaps, too, if the director is discreet as regards

your name and address, which you say are not to be divulged, you may escape the worst consequences of your venture. But if you will let me advise you as a friend, you won't try the experiment again. You don't quite understand all the dangers you were courting. You might even find the five thousand francs a poor set-off next time."

He put his head out of the window, and changed his tone as he drew it back again. What motive had he, after all, for preaching prudence to this strange young woman he had befriended?

"Where are we now?" he asked her.

"On the Boulevard St. Michel." Her tone betrayed that she was humiliated. "I am afraid it is taking you ever so far out of your way. But we shall be at the Place de l'Observatoire in another minute. How can I ever thank you enough for what you have done for me? I wish I could think you *knew* how grateful I feel."

"There is nothing to thank me for." The words were uttered in all sincerity, though the tone was brusque. "Will you"—he hesitated—"will you allow me to call and see how you are getting on the day after to-morrow? I shall be leaving Paris shortly, and I should like to have your assurance that the director has paid up as he promised. As you allowed me to conduct that transaction for you, I consider myself responsible for his good faith."

Eila did not answer at once. When she did, it was evident that she was ill at ease.

"It is wonderfully kind of you to interest yourself in us," she said in constrained tones, wondering the while what pretext she should find for introducing this deformed stranger into their miserable home. "You know my mother has been ill, and I have told you how we live; but if you don't really mind, and it is not too much trouble——" She stammered, finding her words with difficulty, and Hubert cut her short.

"Thanks—at four o'clock, then, the day after to-morrow. But stay, let me give you my card."

The carriage had drawn up before the heavy closed door of the *porte-cochère*. He got out and rang the bell, and

Eila, as she descended in her turn, saw beneath the lamp-light his misshapen shadow lying upon the pavement at her feet. For an instant she was conscious of an inward shrinking. She had almost forgotten his uncouth appearance during their exchange of confidences in the dark.

She held her hand out to him at parting, and felt it taken into a powerful and friendly grasp. The door opened suddenly and noiselessly upon the dark entrance-way as she bade him a last good-night.

"You don't mean to say you will have to grope your way upstairs in the dark?" he called after her as she turned away from him.

"I will indeed. The lights are all out at half-past ten, and we have to call out our names when we pass the little den at the foot of the stairs where the concierge lives."

"What a barbarous arrangement! Wait a moment, won't you take my match-box?"

"No; I know every step," said Eila, laughing; "but I hear the concierge calling out. He knows in his sleep when the door is not shut. Good-night, again, and thank you once more with all my heart!"

Hubert turned away. He drove back to the hotel in the rattling cab, but did not look for Jack Wilton when he arrived there; he was in no mood to answer the unconsidered questions of the young man, or perhaps he preferred to remain alone with the recollection of his night drive with the Bacchante.

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## CHAPTER V.

### EILA'S DISCOVERY.

EILA meanwhile bounded up the stairs in the dark with a sense of wild elation and dream-like elasticity of tread. Her footfall made no sound as it flew from step to step. Entering the apartment noiselessly with the aid of her pass-key, she crept through the empty reception-room into her chamber. A plaintive voice greeted her from the bed on

the floor, and a little figure, dimly outlined in white in the darkness, rose up to throw two tightly clinging arms round her neck.

"Not asleep?" said Eila, gently chiding, but holding the little figure close to her heart at the same time. "Is Mammy back?"

"Long ago," said the child wearily; "she had such a lovely day. And only think! they had a big ice-cream made just like a polar bear at dinner. She brought us back some chocolate, too; I wouldn't eat mine till you came, but I couldn't help just nibbling a little corner of it."

She held out her prize to her elder sister, and Eila, having shut the door and lighted the candle, seated herself on the edge of the mattress on the floor, while Truca nestled close up against her for the double enjoyment of feeling her sister's protecting arm and eating the chocolate simultaneously. She bit hungrily and contentedly into her treasure, and Eila said:

"You shall have chocolate and croissants to-morrow morning for breakfast, darling, and veal and spinach for dinner."

"What me, and all of us?" cried the child in delighted wonderment.

"Yes, I promise you; only just let me see the name on this card with the candle first, will you, dear?"

Truca lighted the candle obediently, and held it close to her sister. Eila drew Hubert's card from her pocket and proceeded to examine it. The name that confronted her was that of Mr. Hubert de Merle. The words "Tarragunyah, Queensland," were also printed in the corner, but across these a line had been drawn. The card was slim and polished, and the type was in neat italics; but had the name it recorded been inscribed in the same fiery characters as those which God's avenging finger traced upon the walls of the Babylonian palace, their import could hardly have been more startling to the person who read them. Few and far apart are the coincidences in our everyday lives which make us realize the truth of the saying that "fact is stranger than fiction." When they do occur, their first effect is to

induce a feeling of grim reality best expressed in the immortal words, "Do I sleep? Do I dream? Are there visions about?" Eila gazed stupidly at the card for a few moments. She did not call out, or disturb Truca in the enjoyment of her chocolate. She sat as one turned to stone, uttering neither word nor sound. So the thing the family had come across the world to seek, in so foolish and so mad a fashion, had dropped across their path unsought. Even the wildest of their mother's prophecies had never pointed to a more unlikely conclusion than this. How came their cousin to be in Paris unknown to them, after all, and why out of the two millions inhabitants in that city, nay, out of the twelve or thirteen hundred millions that form the presumable population of the globe (upon the strength of her being Truca's instructress, young Mrs. Frost kept her memory of school-room statistics green)—should he be the very one to go to the Folies-Fantassin on this eventful night, and to come forward as her sole champion and protector? Let scientific people laugh her to scorn, let her own veneration for the cause-and-effect theory of the universe be shaken to its foundations, she must yet feel that there was something more than a mere coincidence in this miracle. Only a short time ago she had been led to believe that Hubert de Merle was non-existent, or that if he existed at all it was in the guise of a backwoodsman, or a back-block squatter in the remotest wilds of Queensland. He had seemed to her under this aspect as far removed from her earthly sphere as the woodcutter in the moon, that had been such a familiar object to her in the Southern Hemisphere, until he had been turned topsy-turvy in the Northern one, and transformed into a bloated-looking face. Hubert de Merle actually alive and in Paris, and coming to see them the day after to-morrow of his own accord! The day after to-morrow?—nay, to-morrow itself, for it was already past midnight. There could not be two Hubert de Merles, both having been in Queensland, and both owing to a French grandmother. This Hubert bore the same relationship to the Chevalier as herself. He was the Hubert of the ruby, the Hubert of her mother's legends and her own sea-inspired dreams; yet not that Hubert, either,



for the first had been a fairy prince, and this one was a Caliban. Should she wake the household, and narrate the whole miraculous incident to them at once? Should she cause them to lie awake throughout the remainder of the night for sheer joy and excitement? No; she would be prudent, and keep her secret to herself for the present. The night brings counsel, says the proverb. Perhaps, on second thoughts, she might deem it wiser to leave the family in ignorance of all that had passed until Hubert declared himself. Reviewing the position more calmly, she reminded herself that they had no kind of claim on their cousin. He might have neither the will nor the means to help them. Their mother had taught them to look upon the name as a magic one; but had not their mother also led them to believe that Europe was to be their promised land, and what had it proved to them so far but a place of exile and sorrow? Supposing, too, that none of the anticipated wonder should be realized, that neither the two hundred pounds nor Hubert himself should be forthcoming in the next forty-eight hours? Eila felt as though the strain of expectation would be almost more than she could bear. It was well for her that there was her little sister to consider. She found an outlet for her overwrought feelings by heaping caresses upon Truca, murmuring soothing words of consolation to her, and hinting vaguely at better times in store as she lay down upon the mattress with her arm round the little body by her side. Truca fell after awhile into blissful unconsciousness, but for Eila there was no sleep. Her thoughts were so vivid that they seemed to beat at pulses in her brain. Hopes and fears raced after each other at lightning speed through her mind—hopes that her dear ones might be rescued from the slough of despond into which they had fallen, and rescued by means of the ordeal she had been through that night, and the wonderful consequences that were to result from it; fears lest some unlooked-for catastrophe should happen before the morrow, lest the director who was to send her the money should die or fail, lest Hubert, who was like a magician or a dwarf out of the "Arabian Nights," should somehow be spirited away. Of his good faith she never

once doubted. Lies did not look through his eyes nor speak in his voice. But how should she contrive to appear like her ordinary self on the morrow? How endure the slow creeping on of the hours, marked by the one little clock that had been brought away from Cowa? How reply to her mother's questions in her customary calm voice when her heart would beat so wildly with the sound of every step on the stairs? The small hours of the night grew apace. She heard the clock of the Vol-de-Grace sound each fourth until the morning broke. The market carts from Montrouge lumbered down the boulevard. The early workmen's train rolled by, and the doleful notes of the conductor's horn sounded upon the dawn. By-and-by the milk-woman came to fill the tin can hanging outside the door, and Eila rose from her mattress to order a double quantity.

Nights such as these bring lines to maturer faces, and eyes set in mourning circles; to our heroine they brought shining orbs, and an ethereally intensified expression of countenance. Next day she found that her strength was equal to the trial that awaited her. She went singing about the apartment in the forenoon, and prevailed upon her mother to appear at the dinner-table for the first time since her illness. She declared that the great occasion must be fittingly celebrated, and never surely was such satisfaction depicted on the faces of a hungry group as when the portions from the *rôtisserie* made their appearance punctually at half-past twelve, and a full plate of veal and spinach was set before each member of the family. Dinner was drawing to a close, and the party was feasting upon a long glazed loaf and *fromage de Brie*, when a ring at the electric bell made everyone start. Eila hurried with chalk-white cheeks to the door. A man in uniform, in reality a commissionaire from the Hôtel du Louvre, but to the ignorant family assembled a formidable public functionary, entered the room, and asked with an air of assurance for Mademoiselle Frost. The family was struck dumb, but Eila replied, "C'est moi!" in tones which were actually audible though the speaker's voice trembled; then turning hurriedly to the rest, she added in an undertone, "I will take him through to

the reception-room ; I think it must be something about a —a lottery I put into, only I didn't tell you." The family was so far held in check by the commissionaire's appearance that they forbore to question further, and Eila led him boldly into the adjoining room and closed the door. To say that her heart throbbed wildly as he pulled a small bag out of a breast-pocket, which it had unduly bulged out, would be to give but a faint idea of the well-nigh sick tumult of sensation that beset her. With a dream-like feeling of bewilderment she received the bag in her hands and clutched it closely, while the man informed her that his instructions were to ask her to *verifier*. To verify ! Was it not enough to feel the weight of the enchanted bag, in thickest brown paper, carefully sealed, that she was holding ? Mechanically she sat upon one of the battered trunks, broke open the bag with trembling fingers, and poured the contents into her lap, a cataract of shining coins which she counted carefully before returning them to the bag. Two hundred and fifty bright gold pieces of twenty napoleons each—and what had she done to earn them ? There was the shame and the sting ; yet, if people chose to throw away their money so insanely, why should not she, as well as another, stoop to pick it up ? She had done what she had undertaken to do, and the prize had been fixed by the director himself. In the first flush of joy and triumph she fancied she must have received fifty coins too much. Fortunately, a speedy mental calculation set her right before she had yielded to the first impulse of returning them and enriching the commissionaire by the amount. The counting being accomplished, the next formality was the signing of a receipt handed her by the messenger, bearing the words, " *Prier de rendre la quittance signée au porteur.*" The receipt was drawn up for a sum of five thousand francs, but bore no reference to the transaction for which Eila supposed the money to have been sent her. Having signed the document with fingers that trembled with excitement, she changed her first twenty francs in order to bestow five upon the messenger. She took the first napoleon at random for this purpose, and the sensation in her hand of the three bulky five-franc pieces that the

man returned her with a "Je vous remercie infiniment, mademoiselle," brought her the first realization of the significance of the magic bag. Had she followed him down the staircase, she would have seen him go a little way along the Boulevard towards a closed brougham, in which a deformed man was seated. She would have seen him hand the receipt to the latter, who, after examining it for an instant, would have been further seen to put it away in his pocket-book and to sign to the coachman to drive away.

As for Eila, left alone in possession of the money, she was inclined to doubt the evidence of her own senses. Often had she wondered what she should do and how she would act if some heaven-sent shower of gold could rain upon her in the night-time as it rained upon Danaë imprisoned in her tower. She had dreamed of how she would assemble the family in their dire distress around her in the morning and give them handfuls of gold all round. Now her dream had come true. It was on the point of being realized. Her wild fancy had turned into an actual positive fact.

She had closed the reception-room door during her parley with Hubert's messenger, taking thereby all the relish out of the *fromage de Brie* for the family, who were devoured by uneasiness and curiosity. But as soon as he was gone she uttered a whoop of summons which brought them all tumbling into the room upon each other's heels. First, however, she had taken the precaution to hide fifty gold pieces in her pocket as a reserve fund. Even her mother was not to be told of the existence of this provision for a rainy day. The rest of her money she held in her apron, which she had gathered up in front of her like a bag.

"I want to tell you, darlings all," she said quaveringly, as the astonished group gathered round her—any great emotion is apt to make us effusive, for what is emotion, after all, but a transient form of intoxication?—"I want to tell you that I have some good news for you. I have won a prize—never mind how. I didn't tell you about it, for of course I might have lost. But I won, and the prize is here"—she rattled her apron—"and now I am going to distribute it all round. Mother comes first."

Then solemnly, as Mrs. Clare incredulously and mockingly extended her hand as though entering into the spirit of the joke, Eila took the gold pieces up separately one by one, and dropped them into her mother's palm until the gold overflowed and the napoleons fell upon the polished floor. It was a pity that Hubert was not at hand with his Kodak to fix the faces in the family group during the course of this stupendous operation. As the process of counting went on from twenty to thirty, from thirty to fifty, from fifty up to a hundred, an expression more akin to fear and awe than to pure joy was painted upon each countenance.

Mrs. Clare was the most composed.

"I knew it," she said solemnly; "I was quite sure of it. I knew it must come before long. How much is there here, my dear? A hundred napoleons? It's a pity they're not sovereigns! Such trumpery gold pieces as the French have, to be sure! I wonder they're not ashamed of them. And how much more is there where that came from? Anyhow, it could not have come when it was more needed."

"It is the turn of the others now," said Eila; "but they must make me a promise that at least half of what I give them shall be spent on useful clothes, also that I may help them to choose. Hold out your hands!"

"It's what they used to say at school when a fellow was going to get a cut with the cane," observed Dick, stretching forth his hand, nevertheless, and closing his fingers eagerly upon the ten napoleons that Eila counted into it.

Mamy received a similar sum with feigned squeaks of delight that reached their crescendo pitch as the tenth gold piece was counted. Some objections were raised to the bestowal of an equal largess upon Truca by reason of her youth; but Eila declared she was sole dispenser of the fortune.

"Ten must go to Willie," she said, "and that only leaves me fifty to carry on the housekeeping with, to buy the necessary furniture, and to pay our debts. Even when the remittance comes, we must steer our way very carefully, for prizes are not won every day. But I suppose mother will help."

Mrs. Clare, who had been nursing schemes of sending a detective to Australia in search of the lost cousin, smiled mysteriously.

"I will go to the studio to-morrow," declared Dick.

"And I," said Truca gravely, "will send Mr. Acton money to pay Daisy's passage home to Paris."

The greater part of the afternoon was spent in discussing the plans that each member of the family proposed in turn. A hundred times did they together and separately count and finger each piece of gold. A horrible suggestion having been made by Dick that the coins might turn out to be false, they were rung in turn upon the floor of the reception-room, until the other inmates of the tall house supposed the eccentric family from *outré-mer* to be playing pitch-and-toss among themselves. As even this test was not considered sufficiently conclusive, Dick was despatched with a napoleon taken at random to the baker's. He was a long time away, and the family went through an anguish of suspense, compared with which even the Cape Horn horrors were as nothing. He meditated a diabolical plan of terrifying them on his return by declaring that the baker had refused the money; but long before he reached the top of the stairs the sound of his step had reassured them.

Joy, like grief, leaves a curious lassitude behind it. Before the afternoon was over, Eila was relieved and grateful that Hubert should only have suggested calling on the morrow. Such a combination of impossibly exciting events would have been too much for the family nerves, to say nothing of their mother's health. Almost depressed by the magnitude of the emotions they had been through, the family went early to bed.

Dick found vent for his overwrought soul by standing upon his head while the eggs were being boiled—a large new-laid egg per head—for tea. But he looked even graver than before after the feat was accomplished, and Eila retracted a project she had meditated of taking him into her confidence with regard to the event of the morrow.

## CHAPTER VI.

## HUBERT RECOGNISES HIS AUSTRALIAN COUSINS.

No one was found to raise a disclaimer the following day when Eila proposed that the family should dine sumptuously at one o'clock at the Duval's at the corner of the Rue de l'École de Médecine. Mrs. Clare, upon whom joy had acted as a tonic, declared herself well enough to accompany her children; and the happy party defiled down the boulevard in a straggling line, and entered the afore-mentioned chocolate-and-gold palace of cheap repasts. No necessity now for bringing their *menu* within the limits of seventy-five centimes for each.

"Eat what you like, dears, and as much as you like," was Eila's repeated injunction, as they sat all together at a square marble table on the ground-floor near the window.

Even with this encouragement, it was almost in fear and trembling that they gave the reins to their appetites, and ordered full portions of purée, raie au beurre noir, and other delicacies of the kind. Mamy was secretly ashamed that the carnal satisfaction of eating her fill should make such a difference in her sense of the value to be attached to existence. Here were only three successive days during which she had been living, so to speak, upon the fat of the land, and already the thought of going back to the pinching and scraping emptiness of the previous weeks made her shudder. She felt a sudden pang of pity for the hungry poor.

"How *can* we sit down to our meals with the thought that so many people about us are suffering that horrid ache of emptiness?" she thought. "Can it be that they get used to it? But no; I should think it only went on getting worse. I will give some of my money every day to that blind man who sits on the boulevard, though I suppose if we gave away every centime that we have in charity, things would be as bad as ever in a few weeks, and we would be in the same miserable plight as before. It is so much worse to see one's own people hungry than others. We simply could not stand it if we really felt that the poor were our brothers and sisters

in any kind of way, as we are told we should feel. After all, it is nonsense, that notion of telling people how they ought to feel. One may tell them how to speak and how to act; but what is the good of telling them how to feel? Their feelings are under nobody's control—not even their own; they feel, or they don't feel, because they can't help themselves."

Mamy's meditations, which rendered her unusually silent during the meal, resulted in her giving fifty centimes to the blind man as she passed him on her way home the same day. Next time she passed she had no change, and the following day she purposely walked on the other side of the boulevard, to avoid being confronted by his red-rimmed, sightless eyes; she had discovered that her desires increased with her money, and that it would be quite possible to come to the end of even ten napoleons after all. Eila's only extravagance was the purchase of a faience pot, splashed with blue, and a heap of golden brown chrysanthemums. With the aid of these she imparted a decorative aspect to the reception-room, and called the family to admire the effect. Mrs. Clare was, as usual, the most appreciative.

"It is considered quite vulgar in Japan to display more than one work of art at a time," she observed. "I forget where I read it, but you may be sure the room of a Japanese grandee is as bare, or barer, than this. It is a thousand pities there is nobody to see it. What if we were to invite Mrs. Warden and her party to an afternoon tea."

"We have a visitor coming, I think," Eila replied with a mysterious smile; "but I want you to let me receive him here first, and prepare him for your coming. I will call you very soon after, I promise. Only don't ask me about it," as her mother began to question her eagerly; "it isn't Willie, that's all I can tell you, and it's a secret. But I hope it's going to turn out a pleasant surprise."

"More secrets and more surprises!" exclaimed Mrs. Clare. "You surely haven't gone and put into another lottery?"

"No, there's no money in this surprise," said Eila cheerfully, "but something almost as good. Only I can't pre-



pare it properly if everyone doesn't keep out of the way when the bell rings."

Almost as she uttered the words the ting of the electric bell rang sharply through the apartment. The family, with the exception of Eila, scuttled into Dick's room at the back, the door of which was heard to close with a bang, followed by loud expostulations from inside. Eila meantime ran precipitately to the little front-door of the apartment. But she paused with her fingers on the handle, afraid to open it lest she should betray the overweening agitation that mastered her. Her very breath seemed to fail her, though, as often happens when our emotions are keenest, she was outwardly exceedingly calm. Though fully prepared for the sight that encountered her as she opened the door, she could hardly forbear starting back as she perceived Hubert standing on the landing wrapped in an enormous cloak, from the folds of which his shaggy head protruded uncannily, like that of some bird of prey.

Though, by reason of his deformity, he was fully half a head shorter than herself, he struck her as looking bigger and more formidable than on the occasion of their first meeting. She made no demonstration, however, and to this fact may be attributed all that subsequently befell her in connection with him. Hubert had resolved, as he laboured up the staircase, to watch the Bacchante's demeanour narrowly. If, upon a second encounter with him, in the daylight, she should remind him by word or gesture of the hideous truth she had charmed away from his consciousness for two blissful hours the first time he had met her—if, even though involuntarily and unwittingly, she should force him to remember that he was not as other men, he would leave her there and then, never to cross her path or to mock her beauty by his accursed presence again. Bitterly had he regretted his promise to call upon her. The recollection of that one hour during which she had leaned upon his arm, looked confidently into his eyes, reclined by his side like a tired child in the jolting cab, should have sufficed him to the end of his days. Such an experience had never come to him before, and could never come a second

time. Fortune, in a sportive mood, had sent him to the aid of beauty in distress at the psychologic moment, and should he never see the Bacchante again, she would probably think of him henceforth under a no more untoward aspect than that of her defender and preserver. To appear bodily before her in the light of day would be to destroy the spell and to embitter eternally the remembrance he would so willingly have cherished of her in his own behalf. But he had promised, and though he was angry with himself for having promised, he was yet glad that he had so good an excuse for acting in defiance both of his anger and of his better judgment.

If Eila maintained her presence of mind, the same might be said of her cousin. During the sharp half-defiant glance he cast at her, he had time to perceive that the Bacchante was no mere ballroom and footlight beauty. Perhaps the pure rich colour of her skin, with its youthful smoothness and firmness of outline, showed even to greater advantage in the garish light of day. Her much-worn black merino was encircled by a frilling of soft white muslin, which becomingly framed her statuesque neck, while the inevitable flower nestled against her fair throat. Her hair, that grew lavishly on her temples and forehead, a rare beauty in a woman, was a bounteous adornment in itself. It was sufficient for Eila to perform the process known as tidying her hair to look fit for a Parisian coiffeur's window.

Hubert took off his hat and shook hands with her ceremoniously, and she cried almost simultaneously :

"The money came yesterday—two hundred and fifty gold pieces! Can you believe it?"

"Hardly," he said, smiling. There was no betrayal in his smile; then, more gravely: "I think you came out of that transaction very well."

"So do I!" triumphantly; "and there is more to tell besides."

She preceded him into the reception-room as she spoke, where a chair, bought especially for the occasion, had been placed at an angle whence the occupant could command an elaborate view of the vase of chrysanthemums, the Cheva-

lier's picture above it, the highly-polished mirror to the right, and the wide expanse of autumnal sky and bare tree-tops through the curtainless window. The weather was just chilly enough to make the first fire of the season that had been lighted that morning in the new and highly ornamental stove a pleasant feature in the room. Eila invited her visitor to seat himself, and took the only remaining chair for herself.

For conversational purposes two stiff chairs in an unfurnished room form the most uninspiring background that can well be imagined, but in the present instance there were topics so weighty to be discussed that these minor considerations were of no account.

Young Mrs. Frost did not give her visitor time to make any conventional observations as to the brightness of the view or the chilliness of the day. She plunged without preamble into her great news.

"What do you suppose I have found out since I saw you—since I read your name on the card you gave me the other night?" she said with mounting colour; and, as Hubert raised his eyebrows inquiringly: "Why, that you and I are cousins!" she added in tones that trembled with excitement.

She spoke with such assurance, her expression was so radiant, he could not doubt that she intended him to accept the startling announcement as the literal truth.

For a moment Hubert could only look his astonishment. Then: "I am exceedingly flattered," he said courteously, though with evident bewilderment, "unless"—he paused and smiled sceptically—"unless, as they say in Australia, you are taking a rise out of me."

"How could you think such a thing?" Her eyes flashed an eloquent disclaimer. "It is the simple truth I am telling you. I will explain it all directly. But first would you mind looking at the picture over there on the wall—almost opposite—just above the chrysanthemums?"

Hubert obeyed. He lifted his eyes with effort, but having observed the picture, he left his chair and walked towards it leisurely for a closer inspection. He had refused

to lay aside his cloak, which somewhat resembled that of a stage hero, and which he wore as a disguise as well as a covering. We know that the Abyssinians are able to express a whole scale of emotions, varying from the deepest respect and humility to the loftiest pride and defiance, by the simple gesture with which they throw the corner of their mantle over the shoulder or the arm. Hubert had unconsciously adopted something of the Abyssinian custom in his manner of draping himself in his inseparable cloak. When he leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms beneath its folds, he was satisfied with the company in which he happened to find himself and willing to talk. When he sat huddled up under it with his head on his breast, he was brooding over the curse of his life. When he stood up and threw the two sides back over either shoulder, he was interested and animated, and had a motive for dissimulating his deformity to the uttermost. This was the gesture he now employed almost instinctively as he turned towards Eila, who had remained seated the while, and who was watching him with eagerly expectant eyes.

"Are you any connection of the gentleman with the queue?" he asked deliberately enough, "for in that case I may certainly claim the honour of the relationship you attest. This picture is the same that used to hang in my mother's bedroom when I was a boy—or, rather, it is the original, for I believe ours was only a copy: it is the portrait of my grandfather—my mother's father——"

"And *my* mother's grandfather—our great-grandfather," interrupted Eila joyously. "Is it not the most wonderful coincidence in the world? If one were to read it in a book, would not one say directly that it was too improbable?"

Her eyes were sparkling. Was it kinship only that caused so unwonted a glow to make itself felt in Hubert's breast? He held out both hands, and Eila rose to give him her own. They remained in his grasp while he said, looking at her with undisguised pleasure:

"So you are my cousin. I might have known you had some claim on me when I was prompted to go and look after you the other night. It looks as though there were

something in the old saying that 'blood is thicker than water,' doesn't it?"

He did not release her hands immediately. His own were pleasant-feeling, powerful hands that knew to a nicety how to make play with a sword or to manage a horse's mouth. They knew also how to express the fervour of newly-discovered cousinship with a beautiful young woman, though this was instinctive, and not the result of practice. Before their hands separated, Eila and her cousin looked for an instant into each other's eyes, and a certain mutual liking grew out of this transient glance. To be indifferent to Hubert's deformity was impossible. If it did not repel, it inspired a pitying interest.

Now, Eila's nature was not one to be repelled by any form of affliction, and if she had been drawn to her cousin in the first instance by his knight-errantry in her behalf, the feeling was not diminished by the fact that he was also an object for her pity. As he looked at her, she became magnetically aware that she had found favour in his eyes, and the reflection was not displeasing to her.

Nothing more readily facilitates the establishment of a good understanding between two people of opposite sexes, no matter what their age, looks, position or separate responsibilities may be, than a perception of the kind aforesaid in the mind of the woman. When we are sure of pleasing we remain instinctively our natural selves, which is tantamount to saying that we show ourselves at our best; and this is already a great step towards the engendering of agreeable relations.

The family undergoing durance vile in Dick's room had time afforded them to wax justifiably wroth with their gaoler. They had begun to rebel long before their summons of release arrived, for Eila had important matters to plot with her newly-found cousin and champion, before she could reveal her secret. Hubert had stepped out upon the balcony, after releasing her hands. Perhaps he wanted to collect his thoughts, or perhaps it was only that the *tête-à-tête* upon the two stiff chairs struck him as unendurably formal, and Eila following him out, the two leaned over the railings

together—where they seemed more upon a level—hatless, despite the chill in the November air, and there upon that airy perch, with the quiet gray sky above them, and the noisy rumble from below helping to screen her confusion by the opportunity it afforded of exclaiming at intervals: “I can’t make it clearer, there is such a noise!” or “Can you hear with all that clatter?” she had in a measure confessed herself to him. He had asked her a few leading and direct questions. How many were they in family? What was their previous history? Why had they come to Europe? Eila had answered with simple straightforwardness. She had alluded in the course of her narrative to her own unhappy marriage, and had related her husband’s incarceration in a lunatic asylum in Tasmania. She had kept her face averted from her cousin, looking across at the fountain on the broad *place* below, as she imparted these facts; therefore she could not tell how Hubert looked on hearing them, nor what he had thought, but she *fancied* (*was* it only fancy?) that his voice sounded more constrained the next time he spoke; she likewise informed him of her mother’s widowhood, of the castles in the air the family had built from their childhood upwards, of their reckless journey home and the terrible penance they had paid, of the cruel straits to which they had been finally reduced, and of the desperate resolution she had taken to exhibit herself on the stage of the Folies-Fantassin; furthermore, of the miraculous aid afforded them by the result of her experiment, and of the marvellous good fortune of receiving two hundred pounds the very next day without further parley.

“I told you the director did not seem an unkind man,” she said naïvely; “but I could not have dreamed he would have acted in such a high-minded, delicate, honourable manner. The money was sent without question or condition, and you remember I was only for a very short time at the theatre. All I had to do was to sign a receipt, and the man who brought the money was so respectful, you can’t think. He looked like a kind of superior official—not a bit like those hateful *ouvreauses*. I dare say he was chosen on purpose, for it was a great sum, to trust him with, wasn’t it?”

Hubert smiled rather enigmatically at her outburst of enthusiasm in the director's behalf. Perhaps his own experience of this gentleman would not have led him entirely to endorse her testimony. He made no comment, however, and young Mrs. Frost proceeded to assure him of her firm resolve to "manage better for the future."

"It all comes of not having a profession or a handicraft of some kind at one's finger's ends," she said, with a wise little nod of her head. "I have thought since all these troubles came upon us that people who don't work—who can't earn what they consume, I mean—are really cumberers of the ground. In old Mrs. Frost's cottage in Hobart—she was my mother-in-law, you know—there was a text, worked in green and yellow wools, hanging on the wall"—a gleam of retrospective amusement flitted across her face—"‘She eateth not the bread of idleness.’ I don't need the green and yellow wools to remind me of those words now, for I could never, never forget what we have suffered for want of knowing how to set about making or earning some money. I mean now always to have a little sum laid by for an emergency, and with what we have, and what I shall try to earn by giving English lessons, I think we shall be safe for the future."

Despite the confident words, there was an undercurrent of anxiety in her manner. Hubert was touched by the unreserved trust she placed in him. He had encouraged her to confidence by his manner as well as by his questions, and already she felt herself upon the footing of an old friend with him. Besides, was he not her cousin—the only creature among the strange millions who surrounded her to whom she could unburden herself of a portion of her fears and misgivings? It was true that she might carry them all to Reginald in her letters, but the fact of having to wait eleven or twelve weeks for an answer was a motive for checking her outpourings in that direction. Besides, why torment him by dwelling upon troubles he was powerless to alleviate? Yet it was a relief to talk about them to a man who could give her practical advice, and who seemed so earnest and sincere in his proffer of sympathy and counsel. Encouraged by these reflections,

and acquitting herself of the charge of disloyalty to Reginald by resolving that she would tell him everything now that the worst of their money-troubles was over, she continued to reply to the questions that Hubert addressed to her. She did not attempt to extenuate the folly and imprudence that had characterized the family move, which, indeed, had never sounded more imprudent or more foolish to her own thinking than when she came to narrate it to a disinterested listener; but she closed her narrative with an involuntary sigh.

"Still, I can't be sorry I did what you know," she resumed suddenly, as though in answer to some adverse criticism she had been formulating in her mind. "It has made such a wonderful difference in our lives all at once. If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget the scene that took place yesterday afternoon when we found ourselves suddenly rich."

"Does your mother know where the money came from?" inquired Hubert.

"No." Her colour deepened. "She hasn't the least idea. None of them know. They think I won it in a lottery; and it *was* a kind of a lottery." She cast a doubtful glance sideways at her cousin, but quickly changed her tone. "You are laughing at me. . . . I know what you are thinking. They used to call me the special pleader at home, because I never *would* call things by disagreeable names. I know it means nothing to call the affair of the other night a lottery. It wasn't even a *tableau vivant*, as I tried to persuade myself at first. But whatever one calls it, I should be miserably humiliated if the others ever came to know about it. That I should have had the pretension to be paid for being stared at! That I should have made a public exhibition of myself in that awful place! Why, they would want to send the money back, as I do myself when I think of how I came by it. . . . Only I don't know what we should do without it," she added despondently.

"You need have no scruples about the money, I assure you," Hubert said encouragingly; "but you must allow me to remark that you have a curious method of reasoning.



What did you take part in the show for at all, if it was not in the hope of gaining a prize?"

"A prize—yes; but not such a big one."

"Oh! if it's the bigness you object to, I dare say the young lady with the three chins who sat next to you would not object to sharing it with you. Most probably she considers it should have been all hers by rights."

Eila laughed.

"She was enormous, wasn't she? And, really, some of them were rather awful! . . . But we haven't settled how I am to account for having met you. My mother and the rest are waiting in a back-room all this time until I call them. I would not tell them of my great discovery until you had ratified it; so I only told them a visitor was coming in whom they would be interested, so, of course, they are impatient to see you. But do give me a suggestion. I don't want to involve myself more than I can help."

"You want to make *me* responsible this time," said Hubert mockingly. "But why not make a clean breast of the whole business? There is nothing discreditable to you in it."

"*I can't!*" she interrupted him quickly. "If I were to tell my mother, she would never keep it to herself; and—and—it would put all sorts of notions into the head of my younger sister that would do no end of harm. You don't understand, indeed."

Hubert held his peace. He thought, nevertheless, that he was beginning to understand. Her last words had revealed even more than she intended. He gathered from them that this fair young cousin felt herself responsible for the moral as well as the physical well-being of the younger portion of the tribe, and concluded somewhat hastily that the mother must possess but little force of character.

"I must explain how you found us out, too," Eila continued helplessly. "We are all very credulous, but I can't tell the others you were guided to us by a miraculous instinct—can I?"

"Well, hardly; but you might say you allowed me to see you to your door the other night to protect you from

some roughs who were annoying you. How would that be ? There is nothing untrue in it, and it is quite a likely occurrence. There is nothing to conceal either in the fact that I gave you my card at parting, and asked leave, as a compatriot and a stranger, to call upon you."

"No ; that will do nicely," said Eila, relieved.

She was about to leave him in quest of the incarcerated members of the family, when a thought struck her that caused her to turn an eager face towards him again.

"There is just one other thing I want to ask you before I call my mother," she began hesitatingly. "How can I be sure you care to know us at all after what I have told you ? All my life long I shall be grateful to you for helping me the other night, but I would rather keep the memory of that to myself and never see you again, than have you think you were under any kind of obligation to be our friend just because of the accidental discovery that our families are connected."

Hubert did not answer immediately. He was folding his cloak around him as though in preparation to depart, and Eila remained watching him in pained and bewildered discomfiture. Her sensibilities were deeply wounded by his silence. After a mortified pause, she continued hurriedly :

"You may believe me—there is not the slightest necessity for you to make yourself known if you don't wish to do so. I purposely kept my knowledge of your name to myself, and no one in the family has the remotest idea of who you are."

But even as she gave him this assurance, a sense of bitter disappointment was making her breast heave. To play the part of protector and good fairy of the family had become the ruling ambition of Eila's soul, ever since Fate had denied her the legitimate outlet for her early and more passionate impulses. Even as a child, to prepare a "surprise" for the little ones had been the greatest delight she knew, and the feeling had returned to her when she found herself back among her brothers and sisters once more. To produce the mythical cousin Hubert de Merle as a sequel to showering

gold pieces into the apartment would have been a crowning triumph—a consummation such as even her mother's prophecies and her own day-dreams had never been able to surpass. But to make such a consummation possible, Hubert, like Barkis, must be willing. The least misgiving or drawing back on his part would spoil the entire programme; and, after all, when she came to think of it, why should he show himself anxious to recognise the claims of cousinship advanced by a penniless family of Bohemians, such as she and her belongings must undoubtedly appear in his eyes? What wonderful consequences were to follow his sensational introduction to the family circle she could not clearly have explained. But the introduction in itself was a *coup de théâtre* it was hard to be called upon to surrender.

Eila did not see, or perhaps it was only that she did not rightly interpret, the expression in Hubert's face. Neither did she understand that his hesitation had nothing to do with the impoverishment of her surroundings. Had she been able to look into his mind, she would have seen that considerations of a very different kind were influencing it. In the first place, he hated to meet strangers. However they might seek to disguise their feelings, he was morbidly conscious that the first impression he aroused in them must be one of pained astonishment. To meet blood relations in the guise of strangers was even worse than to meet ordinary strangers, for it was odious to think how they would proceed to discuss his deformity the instant his back was turned. He might be as clever as a Crichton and as generous as a Haroun al Raschid, his hump would overshadow these and all his other qualities, and remain eternally associated with his image, to the detriment of all besides.

There was another point still, though with respect to this he heaped scorn upon himself for letting it bias him. From what he had seen of Eila, he did not deem that she could be classed among the women who are capable of kindling a pure flame of friendship in men's hearts. She was too captivating, too *troublant*, to use the suggestive French word that occurred to him in connection with her, and for which there is

no fitting English equivalent. To know her and to be possessed by her—and the one seemed almost a consequence of the other—would unfit a man for carrying on the daily affairs of life in the workaday world. And to hope to establish any warmer ties than those of friendship with the Bacchante was out of the question. Unless, indeed . . . What dark possibilities went whirling through Hubert's mind in the wake of this "unless" I would not venture to say. To be sure, she was a wedded wife; but that was the least of the obstacles that weighed with him, seeing in what manner and degree she was wedded. The one insurmountable, insuperable, damnable obstacle was in himself, and his deformity, which rendered it impossible and ludicrous that he should court the favour of whatsoever fair and gracious woman he might adore. And yet, what had women not been known to do for money? In the case of his beautiful cousin there was a still stronger chord than mere cupidity to play upon. Let anyone stretch forth a hand to hurt her belongings, who were evidently as the Lord's anointed in her eyes, and it would be seen of what her nature was capable. To save them from penury and suffering she might be induced to advance many paces farther along the road upon which she had taken the first step when she sat with vine-crowned temples and bared shoulders in the midst of a ribald crowd in the French music-hall. As for sunning himself platonically in the Bacchante's beauty, and becoming the benefactor of her family for the pure pleasure it afforded him, this was an alternative that Hubert abandoned almost as soon as it suggested itself. The maintenance of a friendship that should go thus far and no farther was an ideal in which he had but little faith. He had seen his cousin only once before, and already he foresaw with certainty that such a friendship would speedily overleap itself, like vaulting ambition, and fall on the other side, as far, at least, as his own feelings were concerned.

His better impulse prompted him to bestow some substantial aid on her family in gratitude for the one illumined hour of his dark existence that he owed her, and then to leave her presence for ever. But even if he adopted this

course, it might be accomplished without his allowing himself to be drawn into the circle of her belongings, and before he had time to succumb still farther to her influence. To benefit her, it was not necessary that he should also burn his wings like the proverbial moth at the candle, and carry away a life-long scar. It is possible that Hubert would have acted upon this second and more chivalrous impulse if he had not happened to raise his eyes at this moment and to catch an expression in Eila's face that instantly overthrew his resolution. Though his reflections and hesitations had lasted in reality but a very few seconds, the time had seemed unendurably long to his companion. Such mortification and humiliation were written in her eloquent eyes that he thought of nothing but how to drive them most speedily away. Whatever might be her motive, the evidence of her anxiety to retain him was secretly very gratifying to him, and he hastened now to reassure her by saying warmly :

"Pray don't think me very rude. I am very much honoured by your offer. As a rule I avoid making fresh acquaintances. I need not tell you why."

It was the first allusion he had made to his affliction, and without premeditation Eila found her eyes suddenly suffused. Hubert noted the change in her face, and, curiously enough, felt himself drawn magnetically closer to her.

"I am something of a bear, I admit," he continued hurriedly ; "and you will allow that there are excuses for me. I would never have dreamed of coming forward the other evening if there had been anyone by to help you."

"What a happy thing for me that you did," said Eila heartily, her face beaming once more with gratitude and pleasure. "Then I may call the others at once ?"

"You may *prepare* them," he made reply, meaningly, but she would not appear to understand. She left him abruptly, and he turned away from the balcony to make a fresh examination of the picture. As he crossed the room to view it more closely, he caught a transient and unexpected glimpse of his own distorted reflection in the polished mirror, with the silhouette of the square protruding

shoulders that seemed to hold his large head wedged between them, and the unshapely mould of the back. He mentally apostrophized this image with something that, uttered aloud, would have been not unlike "You damned fool!" and turned his back upon it, as he stood in contemplation of the straight and courtly effigy of his own and the Bacchante's joint ancestor—the distinguished Chevalier de Merle.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### HUBERT MEETS HIS COUSINS.

"I KNEW it!" cried Mrs. Clare triumphantly, as Eila concluded her story. "Children, what did I promise you when we came away from Hobart? I knew we should find him all along, I always said so. Where is he? Where is Hubert? Take me to him at once."

"He is waiting to see you, mother," said Eila in subdued tones, as a hint to her mother to repress the exuberance of her delight; "but, oh! please wait; don't rush off in such a hurry: there is something I want to tell you all first. Our cousin is not like other people. Perhaps he had a fall, or something, when he was young." Eila could not resist her instinct to smooth away a disagreeable fact. "I don't know—but he is—is——" She drew up her shoulders in unconscious portrayal of Hubert's normal attitude, for the partition wall was flimsy, and she was sensitively afraid lest he should catch the ugly word. Her pantomime was unintentionally more expressive than her words, and the family shrank back dismayed. All but Mamy, who had not seen the gesture, but who had read the expression written upon the faces of the rest.

"He is not mad?" she said in an awed stage whisper.

"Mad! nonsense!" retorted Eila in the same tones. "Only a little disfigured."

The relief which this announcement caused found vent in a violently repressed hysterical giggle on the part of the

others. It was one of the peculiarities of the Clare family to laugh in season and out of season—more frequently out than in. Under the present emergency it took a long time to bring their facial muscles back to a decorous society angle. When this was partially accomplished they made an advance to the door, following their mother in single file, like Alpine tourists, or a troop of Indians on the war-path.

If Hubert was a bear, he was at least a well-trained one. He did not glower at women and girls. There was, besides, something so gipsy-like, so unconventional and so naïve, in the aspect of the lady and children (for his young cousins struck him as being very childish when he saw them grouped together) who defiled into his presence, that they might almost have passed for more curious specimens of humanity than himself. This in itself was a reassuring reflection. It was to be also recorded in their favour that they were better trained in the art of dissimulating than any young people he had met hitherto, or was it that their sister had coached them for the occasion? In either case they appeared utterly and absolutely unimpressed by the fact that Nature had handicapped him so cruelly. They clustered round him, each with a hand extended, and a nasal-sounding chorus of greeting, in which he had the surprise of hearing his Christian name chanted by the youngest of the band. It would appear, then, that he had been a household word among them for years, while he himself was ignorant of their very existence.

“How we have looked forward to this day, my dear own cousin!” Mrs. Clare cried on entering. The others clamoured their welcome. Hubert had retained his cloak, and the vision he presented to the family was that of a dark, bearded face, sallow-hued, but not red, with a broad dented forehead and two oblique eyebrows. The nose was big and rugged, but not unduly wide. The jaw was concealed under a harsh grizzled beard and moustache. There was an expression peculiar to the face which presented a curious combination of feelings, and which the young Clares learned to identify with it from the first time of their seeing their cous-

in. It was made up of many emotions, part vexation, part deprecation, part ironical mirth, and part reproach. It was an entirely characteristic and individual expression, and Eila for one knew in a very short time just what kind of things to say in order to provoke it. To refuse the offer of a treat, or of a benefit of some kind, for instance, upon the ground of not liking to give trouble, was a sure way of bringing it. From the outset, the appearance and behaviour of his new relatives had brought this expression into Hubert's face. It was the exact rendering of the kind of sensation they aroused in him. "Very intelligent, but utter fools," might have been his first rough verdict upon them, for the two qualities, be it said, are quite compatible. The very enthusiasm they were prepared to lavish upon him, when for all any one of them knew to the contrary he might have been an escaped bushranger in disguise, was a proof of their utter ignorance of the ways of the world. Yet he could not look upon their effusions entirely as hysterical gush. It was so evident that, for some reason or other he could not divine, they were really spontaneous and sincere. It was perhaps the easier to tolerate them that the girls of the family were so good-looking. Though far from possessing the beauty of her sister, Mamy was a vision that might have rejoiced the eyes of most people. As for the swarthy lad with the glowing black eyes, Mr. de Merle reserved his opinion about him, though I am afraid the idea flashed through his mind that, if he required an instrument to enable him to play upon the *corde sensible* in the beautiful Bacchante's organization, he would not have far to look for it.

"And how did you find us, Hubert? I may call you Hubert?" said Mrs. Clare radiantly, after the first effusions were over. "For all our efforts to find *you* were in vain."

"I must suppose Providence directed me," said Hubert, with a swift look in Eila's direction, which caused her to blush guiltily. "Anyhow, is it not a singular coincidence that, upon the one occasion in my life when I was able to render a slight service to a charming young lady, she should turn out to be my cousin?"



"I knew it must come some day," Mrs. Clare affirmed, with jaunty assurance. "Why, our main object in coming home, Hubert, was to find you out—to show you our precious heirloom over there"—she pointed majestically to the picture—"and to ask you whether you—you——"

But the rest of the sentence was destined to remain eternally incomplete, for Eila interposed at this juncture with a sudden suggestion that their cousin should be given some tea.

The suggestion was couched in the friendliest tones; yet there was, nevertheless, a hint of menace in Eila's soft voice that was clearly understood by her mother and the remaining members of the family, and which apprised them distinctly that on no account must they venture to allude to the ruby at this early stage of the proceedings.

Afternoon tea is a meal which is possible in the most Bohemian of *milieus*. It is the one refuge and resource of hospitably-inclined but straitened-in-circumstances gentility. Of the store of tea that had been brought from the Antipodes, a small and precious deposit still remained, which Eila produced as a connoisseur in wines might produce a bottle of crusted port a century old.

The family kettle was set on the stove. Mamy arranged the cups upon the marble mantelpiece; they were the latest addition purchased with one of the magic coins. Dick slipped outside after a hurried consultation with his sister, and reappeared a few moments later with a bottle of cream and a St. Honoré. There were seats for everybody, for Truca had made various excursions into the adjoining rooms, and had returned upon each occasion carrying a straw-covered chair. When the kettle began to sing, the company gathered in an irregular circle round the stove, and Mamy cut half the St. Honoré in six pieces—with more to follow—and handed them round. The tea was excellent, and it seemed to have the effect of still further loosening the tongues. Had Mr. Wilton been able to see his misanthropic boss in the midst of the family party at the Boulevard de l'Observatoire, he would have declared that the Bacchante had wrought some spell upon him. Hubert, indeed, was

like Saul when the evil spirit had been charmed away from him. His impressions were somewhat of the following nature: This curious family of Antipodean cousins was evidently prepared to treat him like a long-lost brother. Why should he not enter into the spirit of the joke, and show himself deeply and vitally interested in the separate history of each member in turn? While the mother was recounting these with all a mother's enthusiastic annotations, he might look from time to time at the beautiful and incomprehensible Bacchante, and enjoy the sense of the secret power over her that the secret they shared in common seemed to confer upon him. He noticed that Eila was magnetically aware of it when he looked at her in this way, though her eyes might be fixed on the ground or she might essay to give herself a countenance by making some entirely superfluous observation to her sister. There was a fascination in compelling her to turn her eyes towards him, and in reading the deprecation that was written in them. After all, she had willed that things should shape as they were doing. He would have gone away if he had been allowed. She had compelled him, in a measure, to remain, and now events must take their course. Hubert was a superstitious fatalist as well as a scientific fatalist. He would have said that since it is in the nature of pigeons to be eaten by hawks and serpents, it was evident that a certain proportion of pigeons must be infallibly destined to fulfil this law of their nature. Moreover, would it not be the best thing that could happen to this guileless family, stranded in the midst of Paris, to find someone who, for reasons of his own, would adopt them, so to speak, and set them on their legs? They represented the pigeons in the human world, and might consider themselves lucky if the inevitable hawk only devoured one of their number, and feathered the nests of the remainder with its soft down. Though, if you came to that, the metaphor of devouring signified nothing. A woman is not devoured even metaphorically because she finds a generous protector who benefits her and her family in acknowledgment of favours secret, sweet, and precious.

Hubert had never in his life talked so much on the surface

while his thoughts were so far removed from the topic of his talk. But he proved himself equal to the occasion. So delightfully did he converse, and, what was still more to the point, so delightfully did he listen, that he made, as the French say, the conquest of one and all of the members of the Clare family.

He went away after obtaining their promise to dine with him in a body at the *table d'hôte* of the Louvre the following day. The invitation made the hearts of the assembled family leap—Truca especially, whose imagination had been fired by Mamy's description of the palatial splendours of the hotel, and of the iced Polar bear, whereof she had eaten the paws. After Dick had ushered his cousin to the bottom of the four flights of stairs, he returned to the apartment looking thoughtful; he did not even, as was the case after Mrs. Warden's visit, stand on his head to relieve himself.

He found his sisters eagerly discussing the visitor with their mother.

"Of course it is something of a drawback," Mrs. Clare was saying, "though for a man it does not matter so much. And what a powerful head he has!"

"Wasn't *Æsop* a hunchback, mother?" piped Truca. "And he was so clever!"—with a sigh.

"He's not like *Quasimodo*, that's one's comfort," remarked Mamy pensively. "I don't think I could stand a one-eyed, red-headed cousin with a hump, even though it should be Hubert."

"No," said Dick. "I guess he's more like *Caliban*—a shaggy kind of monster. Well, I wouldn't mind being in his skin and having his tin—that's poetry, you'll observe."

"I would, then!" exclaimed Mamy; "and so would you, whatever you may say. What's the good of money, excepting to buy happiness? And you *couldn't* be happy if you were made like that!"

"Couldn't I?" said Dick meaningly. "That's all you know about it. But one can't argue with a girl."

"I'm not a girl—I'm a woman grown," retorted Mamy; "and, at any rate, I'm as old as you, so there!"

And a moment later the family was engaged in a warm

and closely-contested battle of words, turning upon the questions of the age when people might be considered adults, of what the end and aim of money implied, and of what were the different interpretations to be attached to that portentous and indefinable word "happiness."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### HUBERT ADOPTS THE FAMILY.

THE fortunes of the Clares had taken an upward swing. The two concierges could not accuse the family from *outrémer* of being without a protector any longer. From the day when Hubert made his way up the long flight of stairs that led to the apartment on the *quatrième* their position in this respect had changed.

Madame Potin was used now to seeing the deformed stranger drive daily to the door, and stump slowly up the steps, carrying now some exquisite roses with genuine trailing stalks, anon a small parcel, which doubtless contained some charming present for "ces dames." Many were the conjectures made by the husband and wife as to which of the aforementioned "dames" was the favoured one of the three, for Monsieur and Madame Potin would have shrugged their shoulders disdainfully had you suggested to them that the visitor was upon mere terms of friendship with the inmates of the apartment on the fourth. Even had they been made to believe this strange fact, it would not have increased their respect for any of the parties concerned. Upon the strength of the present hypothesis, their opinion of the family had gone up with a bound, for their friend evidently had "la bourse bien garnie." Upon the first occasion of his calling, Madame Potin had spoken of him contemptuously to her husband as "ce bossu." After Hubert had given her five francs she had changed his title to "ce pauvre monsieur avec la bosse"; and with the next largesse she dropped the

“bosse” altogether, and referred to him as “ce pauvre cher monsieur” only.

Speculations went on in the den-like *loge* for a fortnight, for Monsieur Potin was inclined to think that “la châtain” was the lucky one, from the fact that he had seen Mamy open the door one day to her cousin, while he was waxing the landing outside. Madame Potin declared her belief that it was “la noire.” “Après cela,” she added cynically, “c’est peut-être toutes les deux.” Monsieur Potin allowed that the “noire” was “un morceau friand.” But as for that, “la maman” was not to be disdained even now.

The family, though entirely unconscious of the cause of the new prestige they had acquired, could not help noticing that the concierges were no longer either surly or insolent. True, they cast a meaning look at the girls and their mother every time they went in and out; but this might have been owing to the fact that the hats of the latter had been re-trimmed and their bonnet-strings renovated. In the meantime, moved by her children’s entreaties, Mrs. Clare abstained from making any reference to the history of the ruby in Hubert’s presence. She could afford to bide her time and to enjoy the accomplishment of her prophecies to the full. Her attitude at this time was one of complete and continued triumph. Had not all her predictions been realized, and more than realized? Had not Hubert of the ruby—whom her incredulous children had almost begun to look upon as a mythical personage, or a male Mrs. Harris—proved himself all and more than she had promised? Down with the cold counsels of prudence and the so-called dictates of reason. Instinct was surer than either. More than ever was Mrs. Clare convinced that the one and only guide to be followed was her own unaided inspiration. Where would she have been now if she had allowed herself to be withheld by the fears of a pack of inexperienced children? All she had reckoned upon had come to pass. She had brought the family home, and they had found Hubert de Merle, and he had immediately recognised that his mission in life was to provide for them. Mrs. Clare was secretly convinced in her own mind that even his deformity was a Providential dis-

pensation, granted for the sole purpose of preventing him from founding a home of his own, and of obliging him to keep his affections and his fortune free, until those who were predestined to reap the benefit of them should come his way. The thing seemed so self-evident and so reasonable, now that it had come to pass, so entirely the result of her own foresight as well, that Mrs. Clare could hardly bring herself to feel grateful to their cousin for his lavishness. Also if she avoided the topic of the ruby, it was not only in consideration of Eila's representations, but because there was really no present call for mentioning it, or for proposing to give up the picture in exchange for the precious heirloom. After all, a whole silver-mine counts for more than a single ruby. When the latter is converted into money you soon come to an end of its fiery splendour, whereas the former, if well located and well managed, is as inexhaustible as Aladdin's purse. It was a bewildering thing to the Clare family at first to see three gold coins handed to a waiter for a dinner and no change given, as was the case when Hubert took them all to dine one evening at Bignon's. They could have sunk beneath the table and hidden themselves under the folds of the satin tablecloth at the reflection that they had swallowed all this money in pistachio sauce with salmon trout, iced champagne, and bombe glacée à la Russe. But as time went on and the francs and gold pieces flowed from Hubert's purse like a stream of Pactolus, especially, too, as no faintest change of expression, no hint of a suspicion that he was being asked to give more than was reasonable, betrayed itself in his rough-cast features, the family grew reassured. It was understood that they should meet their cousin's friend, Mr. Wilton, a genuine Australian like themselves, some evening at dinner; but the evening was long in coming, for Jack had been called to England by the unexpected arrival of a friend with a racehorse, and had no idea of the nature of the sequel to the evening at the Folies-Fantassin, which was keeping his boss in Paris.

Several weeks went by, during which Mrs. Clare and her children grew more and more habituated to the new order

of things. If Hubert had no intention of adopting the family permanently, it was conferring but a cruel kindness upon them to steep them in the luxury they were enjoying now. It is hard to go back to a portion of bouilli from which all the flavour has been soaked and boiled, when you have been toying with foie gras in aspic and salmi de perdreaux ; hard to await your turn in a struggling crowd at the tail of a fast-filling omnibus, when a springy landau or swiftly-rolling brougham has borne you hither and thither at your pleasure.

The only person who felt an occasional misgiving at being immersed in these Capuan delights was Eila, but, conformably with her nature, she could not find it in her heart to cast even a transient shadow upon the joy of the rest. Nothing could have been more evident than that they were made for the enjoyment of money. After the first awkwardness of astonishment and unaccustomedness had worn off, they could one and all step into a carriage, enter a restaurant or a theatre, or give a direction to a coachman or a waiter, with as natural an air as though to the manner born. Dick was, perhaps, the aptest pupil. He seemed to be always provided now with pocket-money, and would spend it royally. Surrounded by the aureola shed upon him by his silver-king cousin, he began to be noticed in the streets for his handsome eyes and supple figure. Eila felt something of a mother's pride and tender alarm as she intercepted the glances cast in his direction by the tastefully-attired grisettes. True to their principle of taking no thought of the future, save only the remote and intangible future of what Mrs. Clare called their spiritual essences, the young Clares continued to sun themselves in their good fortune as though it were to last for ever.

Willie alone refused to be seduced from his post in the London bank, or to become a pensioner upon his cousin's bounty. In vain his mother sent him a crossed letter of eight pages—Mrs. Clare's letters were masterpieces of eloquent reasoning, in which she showed him point by point that Hubert de Merle, being in possession of the ruby which rightly belonged to herself and her daughters, was only acquitting himself of a debt of long standing in providing for

the family—in vain declared that, though no open reference to the subject had been made, Hubert was proving tacitly in the clearest way that he appreciated the situation precisely as she did.

Willie's only reply was a blunt inquiry as to what steps were being taken to put Dick in the way of earning his livelihood, and to suggest that, as their cousin was so generously disposed, Truca should be placed in a good school.

The family exchanged pitying glances as this letter was read aloud. Poor Willie was always hopelessly matter-of-fact. It is possible, nevertheless, that even the delights of theatres, restaurants, and long expeditions to Versailles, St. Cloud, and other famous parks and palaces, would have begun to pall in time. But before the novelty had had time to wear off, Hubert made a most entrancing proposition. It was none other than that of combining a tour through Central Europe in a family party. He had proposed the plan to Mrs. Clare in a way that made it impossible to refuse, even had she been minded so to do, which, it is needless to say, she was *not*.

"You see what a helpless old fellow I am," he said; it was upon the occasion of Truca's sewing a button on his glove for him. "If you will take care of me on our travels, and make up your minds about the places you want to see, I will be paymaster and choose the hotels. That's a fair division of labour, and I dare say we won't quarrel about the route."

To say that the family were transported into the seventh heaven by this proposal is to give but a faint idea of the ecstatic delight with which they hailed it. The seventh heaven of soberer folk became a sevenfold seventh to them. Dick alone did not share the transports of the rest. His attitude of late had given Eila some uneasiness. After dinner, which was now a sumptuous evening meal that seemed upon the rare occasions when the family dined at home to come as easily as though it had sprung from some magic table-cloth, Dick would find a pretext for taking himself off, and once he had disappeared, Eila knew that the night would be on the wane before his step was heard ascending



the staircase again. He had entirely thrown over Comte and the Positivist creed. Alfred de Musset's poems and the "Fleurs du Mal" of Beaudelaire were the books that tumbled out from behind his pillow when Eila went to make his bed in the morning; for Eila was still Cinderella in the early part of the day. She had refused to let Hubert engage a servant for the bare wards of the *quatrième*, which, despite the golden atmosphere in which the family moved, remained as bare as ever. It was useless to furnish on the eve of a journey, and Hubert had suggested that they should look for a *pavillon* at Passy in a garden on their return. It seemed to be taken for granted now that he had, in the literal sense of Mrs. Clare's vague prophecy, uttered a year ago on the Cowa veranda, really adopted the family. Nor could he be accused of showing any preferences. He never invited one member of the household without the others. Whatever might be the nature of the daily entertainment or festivity, all alike were bidden to share in it. Neither did he address his conversation more particularly to one than to another. Upon days of threatening snow, when the air outside seemed to pinch the cheeks and make the eyes smart, he would spend his afternoons by the stove of the reception-room smoking. Eila had speedily discovered that he preferred his pipe to a cigar, and the family, taking their cue from her, declared with one accord that if there was one thing they liked better in the world than another, it was tobacco-smoke. The talk on these occasions would be pleasant enough. The Bush and Tasmania were fertile themes of interest; Hubert never alluded, however, to what might be called the middle distance of his life. Then, it was always a pleasure to hear of the days when the duplicate portrait of the Chevalier had watched over his childhood. But more interesting still to the Clare family was the topic of the Unknowable, and the speculative domain it opened up. The earnest persistency with which Mrs. Clare would revert to this fathomless subject, and pour out the same stream of conjectures daily, as the Danaides poured water into their unfillable pails, seemed to afford Hubert much amusement. The interruption for afternoon tea would

make an agreeable break. If it were only the sound of the kettle singing on the stove, and the sight of the girls bestirring themselves to arrange the cups and cut the thin bread-and-butter, there was a suggestion of domestic intimacy and cosiness in the function peculiarly grateful to one who, like Hubert, had led a hermit's life for so long.

It might have been supposed that nothing now was wanting to fill Eila's cup of satisfaction to the brim. Whence came, then, the feeling that haunted her perpetually, that a price would be exacted for all these blessings, which she, and she alone, would be called upon to pay?

It came upon her suddenly one rainy afternoon with the force of a thunderbolt. She had turned round without warning after filling her teapot, and encountered Hubert's eyes resting upon her. It was evident to her that he had not expected her to intercept his glance, and that he had no time to change his expression before she caught its meaning. So clearly and relentlessly this meaning was expressed that her soul quailed before it. Sooner or later, at his own hour, Hubert would appear before her and claim the payment of his debt. In what coin, and after what fashion he might claim it, she could not say; but claim it he would, and at her hands alone. The conviction came upon her with the unreasoning force of an inspiration. She had seen the look in her cousin's eyes that Mephistopheles might have worn when he stood behind Marguerite in the church. It spoke of such a masterful certainty of having and holding her in his own good time that she trembled lest others besides herself should have guessed its meaning. But Mamy and Truca were laughing over some trivial joke, and Mrs. Clare was posing for Dick, who had not found a studio to go to as yet, but exercised his talent, when the fit took him, upon mother and sisters. Eila lowered her eyes in relief, but the impression of Hubert's glance made her shudder when she thought of it afterwards. In vain she essayed to reason down her fears, to treat her terror as the fancy of a sick brain. That the expression she had read in Hubert's eyes conveyed the mute betrayal of his belief that she was his prey, was an idea which began to take possession of

her mind. Nothing but time could dislodge it. She told herself that with this feeling it would have been her immediate duty to come to an understanding with her cousin. She should take him aside and tell him that she could not continue to allow him to heap favours upon them as he had been doing hitherto. If he would assist her to find an honourable employment, and give Dick some sound advice upon the score of the studio, well and good. He would still have earned their undying gratitude, and she hoped he would allow them to look upon him as a friend for life.

Eila rehearsed the interview nightly in various forms in her own mind, as she lay awake through the slowly-creeping hours, while the happy family slumbered. And when the morning came she put off for yet another day the carrying out of her resolve. All manner of objections presented themselves. Supposing she should only provoke the catastrophe she was so anxious to avoid. Supposing Hubert should read her meaning wrongly, and suspect her of seeking to obtain some permanent benefit for the family.

The warning to let a sleeping dog lie would recur to her in connection with his look, and render her yet more fearful of breaking the spell. There was also the impending journey to be taken into account. Would it not be a cruel thing to disturb the joyous and confident anticipations that the family indulged in from morning to night? Perhaps there would yet be time to speak when they returned from their travels. Let them at least enjoy undisturbed the wondrous treat they had been promised. Eila could almost have found it in her heart to envy them their confidence. How entirely happy would she have been without the hidden terror that oppressed her! Hubert was not only kindly and courtly: he possessed such a store of knowledge that to go out with him upon the usually profitless round of sight-seeing was to come back with one's mind filled with fresh views and interests undreamed of before. Life would have been one dream of bliss under its present aspect had she only been able to exorcise the spectre she had raised. But all her endeavours were powerless to drive it away.

And yet even before this nightmare had come upon her,

and when she had found her dreams of pleasure most entirely realized, had she not felt that it was impossible to maintain a constant sense of rapture and surprise? It is a comforting theory to those who ponder upon the hideous mystery of physical pain that the sensation of suffering, like that of joy, has certain fixed limits beyond which it cannot go. This at least is the belief of those amongst us who have not realized the meaning of the word "infinity" in connection with joy or sorrow. Eila would have declared that the theory was true as regarded happiness if not as regarded misery, for even when there had been no nightmare, and all her wishes for the family had seemed on the point of coming true, she had not been able to rise to the pitch of ecstatic satisfaction she considered it incumbent upon her to feel.

A few weeks ago the idea of travelling with the family through Europe in comfort and luxury would have appeared a wild and unattainable dream of delight. Now that preparations were being actually made to carry it into effect, the lassitude of reaction was creeping over her. The phase of misery through which the family had passed seemed far enough away, but she could not forget that, though they themselves had escaped, millions of their fellow-creatures, with no silver-king cousin to help them, were groaning under a similar load.

Mamy was oppressed by no such thoughts. She was still at the age when happiness for ourselves means happiness, or the possibility of it, for all the universe around. It had been a delicious moment for Mamy when she had informed Mrs. Warden that they were going to travel through Germany and Italy, and she had seen the surprise bordering upon incredulity depicted upon that lady's face.

"What! all of you together?" she had exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mamy; "there is a cousin of my mother's in Paris who is going with us—Mr. de Merle, of Tarragunyah."

"What! the silver-mine De Merle!" ejaculated Mrs. Warden, more profoundly astonished than ever. "Dear me! how extraordinary! Since when has he been your cousin?"

This was not exactly the form in which she had in-

tended to put her question, but astonishment rendered her incoherent. She found herself called upon to make a rapid and complete readjustment of the mental focus whence she had been accustomed to view the peculiar family. Such a *volte-face* was not to be accomplished without a sense of giddiness.

"Since when have we found out, you mean," said Mamy composedly. "We always knew Mr. de Merle was our cousin, but we did not expect to find him in Paris so soon."

"He is not married, I believe?" asked Mrs. Warden curiously.

"Married! Oh no! he is not——"

It would have seemed as though Mamy had been on the point of making some confidence she might have regretted, for she stopped suddenly short and said no more.

"Not what? Not a marrying man?"

"No, not a marrying man at all," repeated Mamy, catching at the vague formula, and all Mrs. Warden's efforts to make her more explicit failed in their object.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### A NEW CATASTROPHE.

It was a bright morning in New Year's week—such a morning as the frost and sunshine working in harmony will occasionally produce for the delight of shivering humanity. Mamie stood on the balcony of the *quatrième*, beating her arms with both hands, as she had seen the coachmen do, to keep out the cold. She had left her eldersister to the task of turning out the contents of the weather-beaten trunks on the polished floor of the reception-room as a preliminary to filling them with wearing apparel for the contemplated tour. An animated discussion had been carried on between Eila and her mother upon the subject of what to take and what to leave behind. Mrs. Clare insisted that the greater portion of the lamentable family *bric-à-brac* should be included in

the baggage, and Eila found it necessary to fight a fresh battle over every object she took up from the heap of odds and ends scattered on the floor.

Partly to escape the discussion, and partly because there was so much to look at out of doors, Mamy danced out upon the balcony, shutting the folding glass-doors behind her as she passed out of the room. The frosty air seemed to bite her cheeks and tweak her nose, but it was impossible not to have an illusion of warmth under so brilliant a sun, and by continuing to beat her arms and to breathe upon her fingertips, she contrived to cheat her sensations while she leaned over the railing and watched the scene below.

If the fresh delight of youth in change and variety could be indefinitely maintained, Flammarion's conception of an after-existence devoted to a tour among ever new celestial bodies might have much to recommend it. To our little girl from Hobart, the aspect of the booths that had sprung up in the Paris streets during New Year's week, and that converted the beautiful city into the semblance of a monstrous fair, was a spectacle as exhilarating as it was novel. She could follow the line of booths a long way down the boulevard from her elevated post of observation. And first came a shed filled to overflowing with shining globes, in silver and gold, in red and blue, that dangled from the ceiling and lay heaped upon the counter in resplendent profusion, like the treasures of Aladdin's cave in a theatrical extravaganza. Next came a canvas-covered booth that Mamy passed over quickly. It seemed like a discordant note in a gay chorus; for the exterior walls displayed the effigy of a murderer in the act of strangling his victim, painted in bright vermilion and yellow ochre. Close by was a ginger-bread stall, with the contents bedecked in bindings of pink and white sugar. There were orange stalls overflowing with oranges in silver wrappings, and cosy booths where crisp hot gauffres were served at a sou per head. The roofs of the booths sparkled with glittering rime, and in the streets the ambulant vendor of the new toy of the season (a miniature guillotine that adroitly decapitated a Prussian assassin) was walking up and down, and stopping the passers-by with his cry of

“Achetez le nouveau jouet de l'année—achetez le Prussien décapité.”

Mamy would have liked to spend all her morning in watching the New Year junketers pass in and out of the booths. She felt herself in a holiday frame of mind. Sydney Warden had betaken himself to the Riviera with his mother and sister, and though Mamy would not have gone so far as to say that his absence was a boon, she could not help feeling that it was a relief to be spared the necessity for encouraging or discouraging him for the present. The prospect of the European tour was another motive for feeling joyful. And to crown all, Mamy had been ordered by Hubert to procure herself a new tailor-made travelling suit at a grand costumier's on the other side of the Seine. Even this last delightful consideration, however, could not prevent her from perceiving that the air was very biting. If you cannot hold fire in your hand by thinking on the frosty Caucasus, neither can you keep your hands warm with the thermometer below zero by filling in the details of a tailor-made dress in your imagination. Mamy danced back into the reception-room as she had danced out of it, and burst into a gay laugh as she discovered Eila seated on the floor, her lap filled with a heterogeneous collection of nondescript articles over which she was shaking her head despairingly.

“You look cross for once, Eila,” she cried mockingly; “one would think you were playing a game of forfeits with mother. Here's a thing and a very pretty thing, and what's to be done with the owner of this pretty thing?” She snatched up an old glove and waved it in the air triumphantly.

“What indeed!” said Eila dolefully; “perhaps *you* can make mother listen to reason, Mamy, for I can't. What we are going to do with ‘Selections from the Poets,’ and a Tasmanian cookery-book, and Dick's first attempt at drawing—to say nothing of a broken Chinese workbox and an old bird-cage—on our travels I can't imagine. Mother wants them all to be packed in with our clothes.”

“They take no room to speak of,” said Mrs. Clare promptly; “and they're all worth something. Dear me! I

had that box when I was your age, Mamy. I wouldn't part with it for any money. They don't send such objects as that out of China any longer, I believe. I dare say they have lost the secret of making them. I know I never saw another like it anywhere."

"And the cage," interrupted Eila with a sigh, "it cost seven and sixpence in Hobart when it was new, and we had it in use for years. It's only fit for the *bac d'ordure* now."

"That cage! Why, it's the very thing to pack small objects in," Mrs. Clare said, with cheerful assurance; "you can find what you want in it directly—and that is a great advantage. Besides, if it was worth seven and sixpence before, it's worth quite five francs now; and I'm not going to throw away five francs, or put temptation into the way of the concierge after we've gone."

The discussion was interrupted by the sudden vibration of the electric bell. Everyone started, and Eila composed her countenance as well as she was able, expecting to see her cousin's ungainly form cross the threshold. But it was not Hubert; only the postman, who walked in, uninvited, as Paris postmen are wont to do, and who handed her a small blue paper, stamped with strange hieroglyphics, and a paper book, which he requested her to sign. Eila had risen hastily from the floor, and stood abashed in the midst of the flotsam and jetsam of the family relics. She received the paper with so dazed an air that the postman eyed her suspiciously, and asked her for the second time if she was "*bien Madame Frost*," before he handed her the book for her signature.

It was a relief to find that her mother and sister had left the room. Even Truca was not present, for she had run away after opening the door to the postman; therefore, when Eila had signed the book and despatched the messenger with three sous for his *pour-boire*, she proceeded to inspect the missive at her leisure. It proved to be a money-order for twelve hundred and fifty francs—fifty pounds of English money. While she was engaged in wondering, with something like a feeling of terror, whether it was Hubert who had sent her this money, and, if so, with what purpose, a



second pressure of the electric bell, which she answered in person this time after thrusting the paper hastily into her pocket, brought her the explanation of the mystery. It came in the guise of a telegram, with the curt address of "Frost," the number of the house, and the words "Observatoire," Paris. Eila tore it open. The contents were the following three words: "Receive fifty.—REGINALD."

So it was Reginald who had sent her the money. Alas! how much must it have cost him to send her even this curt message, was Eila's first thought. She turned the telegram round as tenderly as though Reginald's own fingers had handled it. The evidence of his remembrance touched her deeply; but why had he committed the uncalled-for extravagance of sending her money by cable? And why had he chosen this moment of all others for doing so? What reason had he for supposing that the family was in such urgent need of help? If he had fifty pounds to spare, why could he not have waited to send them by the mail with a letter of explanation which would have reached her five or six weeks hence, and which would have cost so much less than the telegram?

"I will send the money back to him," she reflected; "he needs it more than we do, though I dare say he thinks we are just as hard up as we can be. How true his warnings were, all the same! A few weeks ago we were almost without bread, and if the money had come at that time, I should never have gone to the Folies-Fantassin, but then we should have been without the two hundred pounds, and we should never have known Hubert. And yet fifty pounds coming then would have saved us. Only instead of living upon our cousin's bounty, as we are doing now, I should have been obliged to look for work, and perhaps—who knows?—it would have been better for us all in the end."

A third reverberation of the electric bell broke in once more upon her musings. And yet another telegram was placed in her hands. Tremblingly she signed her name for the third time in a third book. Some special providence seemed to keep the family out of the way, as these successive missives, of which none but herself must know the im-

port, reached her. But for greater safety she carried the last-arrived despatch into the miniature kitchen, which was regarded as her own especial *domesne*, and feigned to rattle the saucepans to avert suspicion while she looked at the contents. The telegram was from London, and was sent by her brother. It contained the news of an unlooked-for and overwhelming disaster :

“ Assurance Company failed. Expect no more remittances. Family ruined. Will send ten pounds.”

Eila read these fatal words to the end, but upon the first reading she only half grasped their significance. That they conveyed tidings of a disastrous nature was clear to her from the fact that her cheeks and lips felt so unaccountably cold, and that the blue and white tiles that lined a portion of the miniature walls seemed to grow all blurred and indistinct in an instant. Upon a second reading, the full extent of the catastrophe was borne in upon her, descending with the force of a well-aimed blow. She, her mother, her brothers and sisters, were beggars. Not in the sense of standing like the blind man on the Boulevard St. Michel, with hand outstretched to the passers-by, but in the sense of being actually dependent upon their fellow-creatures to keep them alive. Small as their income had been, they had never doubted that it was certain—as certain as the rising of the sun or the blowing of the wind. To be suddenly and unexpectedly deprived of it through no fault of their own at one fell stroke, seemed as incomprehensible and inexplicable as it was cruel and unjust. The money their father had paid for his insurance had not been dissipated by themselves. It must still be theirs, no matter how assurance companies might mismanage their affairs. There could be no law that allowed men to steal what belonged to a widow and her children—all they had to live upon—and to turn them into paupers at a moment's notice. Eila knew that misfortunes did occasionally overtake people through no fault of their own. She had heard of whole families being ruined by the unexpected failure of a bank, but the meaning of such catastrophes had never been quite understood by her before. She had listened to such tales with something of the incredulity of ignorance.

Could it be possible that the system upon which money matters were arranged in the world was so iniquitous that innocent people might be robbed by those who had charge of their money. That burglars should commit robbery was another matter. That, at least, was honest robbing, for it allowed people to take their precautions, and even to knock the burglar on the head, or to hand him over to the police when he was caught. But to steal the money that had been given you to take care of—the money that a poor dead man had left in trust for his wife and children when he should be no longer there to work for them! That was indeed a cowardly, cruel and dastardly action. Burning tears, that seemed to sear her eyelids as they rose, forced their way down Eila's cheeks. Now she understood the meaning of Reginald's gift of money and telegram. Pitifully, generously, indeed, had he forestalled the news of the disaster. He could hardly have had time to hear of it in Hobart before he had sent his poor fifty pounds to Paris. Well, with that and the napoleons she had stored away after her Folies-Fantassin exploit, there was time to turn round. But afterwards! what would become of the family then? What would have become of them, indeed, all this time if Hubert had not taken them under his protection? In the midst of her tears a bitter smile crossed Eila's lips as she pictured the pauper band embarking upon their Continental tour. But was it not folly to embark at all while they depended for their very subsistence upon the caprice of a rich relation, who might drop them, if he were so minded, as suddenly and inexplicably as he had taken them up? What if Hubert should fall down dead while they were travelling, and before the hotel bill was paid? Such things had been heard of, and should she not see to it that proper precautions were taken before they set out? Ought she not, indeed, to inform their cousin instantly of the catastrophe that had befallen the family, and to make him understand the wild absurdity of their travelling about in luxurious idleness while they were literally without the means of procuring themselves a meal? One thing, at least, Eila was resolved upon. The burden of the catastrophe, and the new and terrible responsibility it

laid upon her, must not be shared with the others. The next remittance would not be due for three months. In her capacity of family treasurer, it was she who had charge of the funds, and before three months were over, Hubert might propose to assist the family permanently, or Mamy might be induced to accept her rich suitor. In any case, she felt determined to keep all knowledge of the blow from her mother and sisters until the news could be communicated without the risk of occasioning them the same feeling of helpless desperation and utter heart-sickness as she herself had experienced on reading her brother's telegram. And then, Cinderella-like, she seated herself on the edge of the little blue-tiled stove, and half closed her eyes in the effort of thinking how she could avert the consequences of the new disaster. It was borne in upon her, as she sat, that the power to avert them was hers if she had the will. For when virtue and talent and innocence are at a discount, there is always a market for beauty. It is the one ware of all others of which the value may be instantly realized. Nor would she have to look far for a bidder; the Prince of Darkness, who whispered this suggestion in her ear, conjured up a vision to enforce it. No vision of a casket filled with jewels was it, like that which the fair Marguerite found on her path; nothing but five separate pictures of mother and Willie and Dick and Mamy and Truca, each in the assured enjoyment of food and clothes and home, and all that they wanted to make life beautiful and pleasant.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE CLOUDS CONTINUE TO GATHER.

It seemed to be Eila's fate now to have to decide momentous questions by her own unaided judgment. Having kept the family in ignorance of their dire poverty upon a former occasion, she resolutely carried out her latest con-

ceived project of hiding from them the new stroke of destiny that had descended upon them.

They were ruined, but to all outward appearance their position was as secure, and even as luxurious as before. Why should she drive them out of their fools' paradise as long as she could help to maintain them in it? She wrote to her brother in London, telling him his ten pounds were not needed, and imploring him to keep the tidings of the catastrophe a secret, until fuller details should be forthcoming, promising at the same time that she would herself break the news to her mother when she might do so with safety. Her own interpretation of this phrase meant when she should have laid the matter before her cousin and ascertained how far he intended to help them. If Hubert promised permanent pecuniary assistance, she might fearlessly impart the news of the disaster to the other members of the family—albeit it was a cruel thing for them to be robbed of their little all (for nothing could shake Eila's conviction that the directors of the insurance company were actual robbers); still, the knowledge that they would not be left destitute would give them courage. And, meanwhile, would it not be an act of unnecessary and wanton cruelty to cast so dismal a shadow over their preparations for the coming journey, since every day of happiness was, after all, a day to the good in the dreary comedy of life? While reasoning thus, Eila delayed, nevertheless, to carry out her plan of taking Hubert into her confidence. The unaccountable misgiving he had inspired in her kept her silent in spite of herself. Yet every day she was aware that the necessity for speaking was growing more urgent. Before long the family would be in the same plight as when she had rescued them by exhibiting herself at the Folies-Fantassin—an episode of which none but Hubert had any knowledge. She had decided upon keeping Reginald's money after sending him a letter which had both touched and mortified him. The outpouring of gratitude that formed its principal theme was pitiful in its heart-felt sincerity, but this was not what the donor wanted. With a little more understanding of his sentiment for her, prompted by ever so little of a corre-

sponding sentiment on her own side, she must have understood that there could be no question of gratitude from her to him.

She devoted her energies now to eking out the money as carefully as possible, and thanks to Hubert's practice of inviting the family to dine almost daily at a restaurant, Reginald's donation promised to hold out for a considerable time. Moreover, there was still her reserve fund from the two hundred pounds to fall back upon, and neither her mother nor sisters had entirely spent their separate share of the gain.

The time of the departure upon the tour of pleasure was fixed for the end of January. It was arranged that the party should travel to Brussels; thence to Cologne, Berlin, Prague, Dresden, Vienna and Buda-Pesth. It was to be entirely Hubert's treat; and upon the strength of the ruby, to which no allusion had been made openly, but which Mrs. Clare flourished before her children's imagination whenever she was alone with them, they were to be accompanied by a courier, who would look after their luggage, pilot them to the best hotels, and perch himself upon the box of their carriage when they were out sight-seeing. Here was a contrast to their erstwhile experience in the London docks. With so brilliant a prospect in view, it seemed almost an impertinence to suggest that they were literally penniless; and though Eila carried the dreary knowledge of the truth constantly about with her, there were yet times when she could hardly bring herself to believe that it really was the truth. Never before had the concierges heaped such courtesies upon them. One or other of the evil-looking pair would run out of their den whenever a parcel for the *quatrième* was delivered below, and carry it up to *ces dames* in person. The girls were perfectly aware that it was the reflected lustre of their cousin's gold which procured them these attentions. Nevertheless, they could not help feeling that they were agreeable. For one thing, it was so much easier to follow one's natural prompting to smile and nod when one was bowed to, instead of being scowled at; and for another, it was nice to make sure of

having one's parcels and letters brought up the moment they arrived.

Eila had, however, more than one burden to bear in secret at this time. After enduring great uneasiness on account of Dick's frequent absences, she had been relieved to find that he had developed a sudden sympathy for Hubert, and that he was constantly to be found in the society of the latter. The oddly-contrasted pair, looking like the magician and the prince out of a tale in the "Arabian Nights," seemed to have special haunts of their own. Dick was also employed by his cousin in his room at the Louvre to copy his business letters and sort his papers for him. Even this small temporary occupation was better than nothing, and Eila had ceased to let the thought of her brother's aimless existence weigh upon her, when an event occurred which proved that her first forebodings had been only too well founded. It came about in this wise, upon a Sunday evening.

Mamy had been reading "Zanoni" to her mother all the afternoon by the side of the stove, for the snow was whirling down in fine-drawn flakes, and at four o'clock the prospect out of doors was so black through the gray-white moving screen, that the blinds had been drawn and the family had clustered round the red-hot centre of warmth. It was taken for granted that Hubert would come with a carriage before seven o'clock to take them to a restaurant. The squeezing in of six people into the large closed landau that he would have waiting for them was part of the pleasure of the expedition, for the family seemed to be all of similar eel-like proportions, capable of curling into a very small space when occasion required. There were evenings when no landau came. Only a boy from the restaurant, with a white paper cap on his head, would appear with a column of most appetizing dishes, which were immediately set out for consumption upon the table from the ante-chamber that had been previously dragged into the reception-room for the sake of the warmth. On this particular Sunday evening, however, Hubert failed to make his appearance. More inexplicable still, Dick did not return, and a dismal circumstance in con-

nection with these two perplexing facts was that no boy in a paper cap presented himself from the restaurant. The family (though their interest in "Zanoni" had begun to wane about six) kept up heart until seven. But as their hunger increased, their uneasiness increased with it, and when half-past seven had struck, the faces of the group were eloquently long. Eila was suffering a tenfold strain of anxiety. "What a thin volcano crust we are living on!" she thought; "we have no claim on our cousin, and no absolute warrant for trusting him. If he chooses to drop us from one day to another, we can have nothing to say. Perhaps his forgetting us to-night is a sign that he has had enough of us. I must speak to-morrow, at all costs; but, oh, what a relief it would be if we had learned to depend upon ourselves! The others are not to blame as I am, for they do not know that we are standing on the brink of beggary."

Her anxiety grew keener as the hours dragged on. Where was Hubert? Where was Dick? Were they together? and if so, how could it be possible that they should have left the family, hungry and forlorn, to await their coming? Some fatal accident must have happened; or was it, perhaps, that one had missed the other? Certainly no definite arrangement had been made; but it was tacitly understood that both of them—Dick, in any case—should appear before dinner could be thought of. Seven o'clock laboured slowly on to eight, and eight to nine, and the consternation of the family reached a point at which it became manifest that something must be done. Even their hunger was almost forgotten in their uneasiness. Eila insisted, when nine o'clock struck, that they should have some toast and tea, after which she proposed to make an expedition to the Hôtel du Louvre through the whirling snow to make inquiries. Mamy declared that she would accompany her sister; and the two girls crept down the stairs in their old board-ship ulsters, feeling almost guilty as they passed the concierge's den, shrinking from the glances of insolent curiosity with which their exit was followed. They took refuge, shivering, in the first tram that



passed silently down the boulevard through the snow, but had to wait a long time in the cold outside the office for the advent of their second omnibus. They exchanged but a few words on their way. Both alike were feeling the terrific contrast between their late mode of life and the actual experience. To Eila it seemed as though the existence they had led during the last few weeks had been nothing but a brilliant dream, and that this forlorn trudge through the winter snow was a coming back to the bitter reality. And both, Mamy more especially, were devoured by anxiety on Dick's behalf. It was true that he had gone his own way much of late, but he could not have ceased to care for his family so entirely as to put them through this cruel ordeal of his own free will. They reached the hotel at last, and here a bitter disappointment awaited them. Hubert was out, and no one could give them the least information as to where he had gone, or with whom. Their mortification was so great that Mamy declared afterwards she understood how tyrants had been incited to order the bearers of evil tidings to be scourged. Her indignation would have been less had there been the least appearance of interest or sympathy expressed in the face of the man behind the counter who gave them the unwelcome information. But after communicating with a voice in the upper regions through a rubber tube, while they stood by waiting with sinking hearts, the man said, in tones of completest indifference, "*Monsieur de Merle est sorti.*" Fuller details it was impossible to obtain. To return with such a message was out of the question. Eila boldly suggested that they should go and knock at their cousin's door, "And if he is not there, we will sit down and wait for him, for they can't turn us out," she said, with determination. But it was no easy matter to find Hubert's door in the labyrinth of rooms spread over all the stories, and when they succeeded at last, it was only to find that their labour was in vain. The door was locked. There was no response from within, and they were humiliated by the tones in which a chambermaid asked them sharply, "*Qui cherchez-vous, mesdemoiselles ? Le monsieur du dix-sept est sorti.*" Downstairs they went again, and, after a

hurried consultation at the foot, decided to take it by turns to watch in the electric-lighted courtyard, while the one who was not on duty was having a "warm" in the reading-room. In all their future lives, neither Eila nor Mamy would forget the dreariness of their sensations that evening. The carriages that rattled in and out of the yard with ladies in rich furs or brilliant opera-cloaks, and the gentlemen in fur-lined coats with crush hats and opera-glasses; the aroma of mingled sauces, cigars, and perfumes; the brilliant light; the constant movement to and fro; the tumult of voices and gay bustle—all gave the impression of a world devised for pleasure. Mamy compared her present impression of the Louvre to her first acquaintance with it upon that joyous evening when she had dined at *table d'hôte* for the first time; and when it was her turn to wait in the lighted courtyard, the consciousness of the desolation of her present situation was intensified by the contrast between then and now. She felt almost like an intruder as she walked through the courtyard in her threadbare ulster and shabby sailor hat, and, fearful of remaining there, went outside, and took her stand before a window in the Rue de Rivoli, where she pretended to look at the photographs. As she gazed disconsolately into the brilliant window, with sensations akin to those of the Peri excluded from Paradise, she became suddenly aware of a man's figure that had come to a halt by her side for the purpose of looking, not at the photographs, but at herself. She was magnetically conscious of this fact, and magnetically impelled to turn her face towards the person who regarded her, with a look of half-terrified, half-indignant remonstrance in her blue eyes. But the expression died away instantly. The face that was looking at her was a face Mamy knew; though she had seen it but once in her life, and for one short moment only, it had imprinted itself on her imagination with the force of an indelible impression. The brilliant scene at the Hôtel du Louvre flashed back upon her memory like a landscape seen under the play of summer lightning. It was there against the background of the glowing mythological paintings, in the midst of the warmth and splendour within, that she had seen the face

before. Mamy's eyes were not only blue, they were tell-tale eyes as well. The fact that she recognised this stranger by her side was so instantly and naïvely revealed in them, and the half-startled "Oh!" which accompanied the astonishing discovery was so thoroughly artless and spontaneous, that the object of her recognition might well be excused for advancing a step nearer. He, too, remembered the face of the "seraph out for a holiday," as Mamy had appeared to him at the memorable Louvre dinner, and was shocked and perplexed to find her standing, apparently alone and shabbily attired, between ten and eleven on a winter's night, on the pavement of the Rue de Rivoli. But under whatever circumstances she might be standing there, the unprotectedness of her position seemed to furnish an excuse for offering his services, if only upon the plea of her being English—nay, Australian it might be—like himself. Another point to be considered: There was nothing of what Mr. Wilton would himself have characterized as "stand off" in the attitude of this pretty little girl, whose "laugh full of mirth without any control" had attracted his attention in the first instance. He was therefore doubly inclined to address her, the only drawback being the consideration that, in our conventional world, the fact that a young man is attracted by a young woman whom he does not know from Adam—or from Eve—is not considered reason sufficient for speaking to her.

"Bother it all!" Jack reflected; "if I had met her in Collins Street, I would soon have found a way of being introduced to her in the orthodox style. But there's no one to do it here, and if I let this opportunity escape, I may never set eyes on her again. Besides, if she can go abroad by herself in Paris at this time of night, she's not the sort to take offence at nothing, so here goes!"

And with "here goes" Jack took off his hat and replaced it on his head, after a friendly bow of recognition. Mamy's answering salute was timid, but not conclusive. Jack advanced closer, and said with assurance:

"I think I have had the pleasure of meeting you before; you were dining with some friends of mine at the Louvre."

The "friends of mine" was a sudden inspiration of the moment, but Jack tranquillized his conscience by telling himself that he knew they were Australians.

"I remember," murmured Mamy, casting down her eyes.

"Do you?" said Jack heartily; "I'm awfully glad to hear it: I know *I* wasn't likely to forget." And then he paused, and Mamy made a little movement as though to take her leave, while the young man continued eagerly: "Won't you let me see you on your way home, if you're alone? Paris isn't a nice place for a—a—young lady to be going about in by herself at night."

"I'm not alone," said Mamy promptly; "I'm with my sister. She's waiting for me at the Hôtel du Louvre. We came to see a relation of ours who's stopping there, but he was out, and—and—I was tired of waiting. But I must go back to my sister now."

"It's not the last time of our meeting, though, I hope," said Jack, following her. "I'm stopping at the Louvre, too; I only arrived from London to-night. What is your friend's name? Perhaps I might be able to help you to find him."

"Oh, I *wish* you could!" said Mamy plaintively—she was walking demurely back under the archway that led into the courtyard, and Jack was walking by her side—"but no, you needn't trouble;" her voice broke suddenly into an eager cry: "he is there, and my sister has seen him; she is coming down the steps to meet him. Oh! I am so glad——"

Her tones were quavering. Jack followed the direction of her eyes in bewilderment.

"Where is he?" he asked; "I don't see him;" but before he had finished speaking his companion had escaped from him, and was running eagerly in the direction of a misshapen figure wrapped in a Rubens cloak, whom the young man recognised as his friend and boss, Hubert de Merle. The discovery was one that in Mr. Wilton's own phraseology "licked creation."

So the little seraph waif claimed Hubert de Merle as a relative. But, then, why had he ignored her presence when he saw her at the Louvre, and since when had he thought

fit to make the discovery that he was of her kith and kin? An instant later, Jack's astonishment was increased a hundredfold, for in drawing nearer to the group at the foot of the Louvre steps he recognised in the seraph's sister, engaged in earnest conversation with Hubert himself, the identical Bacchante of the Folies-Fantassin. The coincidence seemed almost too wonderful to be believed. Jack looked harder at the Bacchante, telling himself that he might be mistaken. But no; even to the hat and ulster, which she had substituted for her leopard's skin the first evening he had seen her, he could have sworn to her identity. She was the same young woman who had driven away from the door of the theatre with Hubert de Merle in a cab. But was she indeed the sister of the fair little girl with the seraph head, whom Jack had perceived at *table d'hôte* with a party of rich and reputable Australians, or had Hubert found means of coining family relationships with and amongst all the pretty young women he encountered?

Thoroughly mystified, the young man continued to hang about the neighbourhood of the talking trio, unwilling to go away lest he should lose sight of the emancipated seraph, yet afraid to intrude upon what appeared like an exchange of family confidences. Hubert put an end to his uncertainty by beckoning him to come nearer, and introducing him to the two girls.

"My friend, Mr. Wilton," he said, directing a searching look at Eila, who was turning from white to red as Jack approached; "Jack," addressing himself to the latter, "I don't think I told you of my cousins in Paris, Mrs. Clare and her family. I only found out they were here the other day. These are her two daughters—Mrs. Frost and Miss Clare."

Jack bowed with exaggerated deference, as though to ask forgiveness for his former unofficial relations with the ladies in question. The appealing air with which Eila responded to his salutation did not escape his notice. That the recognition was mutual was beyond a doubt. Mamy kept her countenance better. Both girls appeared to be

under the impression of some piece of disquieting news communicated by Hubert, for their eyes were shining and dilated, and Mamy's face was working in the effort to keep back her tears.

"What can we do?" she repeated with trembling emphasis. "Oh, Dick! Dick!"

The cry was like the bursting forth of a pent-up terror. Hubert turned towards her quickly. He spoke sharply and decidedly.

"There is nothing to be frightened about," he said; "your brother prefers to amuse himself in his own way, that is all."

"Oh no, he doesn't," sobbed Mamy, protesting. "You say he left you at four, and it was arranged that he should go back to the hotel for you before you came to us. If something had not happened, he would never have dreamed of breaking his engagement—would he, Eila?" and she turned her despairing eyes towards her sister.

"I shouldn't have thought so," said Eila hesitatingly; "but——"

She stopped short, uncertain.

"And you wouldn't *dare* to think it," interrupted Mamy defiantly. "He might be a little late *after* dinner sometimes. He had night effects to study—he told me so; but he would never, never have been late on purpose when mother and all of us were waiting to go to dinner."

"Did you reassure mother about him, at least?" Eila asked of Hubert, addressing herself timidly to her cousin, while Mamy, who had broken down completely at the end of her protest, pressed her handkerchief against her face and wept recklessly into it, oblivious of her surroundings.

Eila was calmer than her sister. Though she loathed herself for the feeling, her relief at Hubert's appearance, bringing the evidence that he had neither fallen down dead nor left the family to its fate, had been strong enough to overcome her anxiety on her brother's behalf. Mamy would have sacrificed all she had in the world, and thrown Hubert and his fortune into the balance—she would have accepted the fate of a beggar in the streets—to have Dick restored safe

and sound to her arms. But Mamy did not know what Eila knew. She had not the same motives for believing that the fate—nay, the very lives—of mother, brother, and sisters, rested upon her shoulders, and that she, and she alone, was responsible, not for their well-being only, but for their very means of sustenance. For four long hours this evening young Mrs. Frost had been undergoing an ordeal of which none but herself could know the secret cause and meaning. “I could have kept Hubert,” she repeated to herself over and over again; “it was in my power to keep him, and he wanted me to use the power. If he has gone away for good and left us to our fate, it is nobody’s fault but mine. Why have I hesitated so long—I, who am always preaching to Mamy about the duty of sacrificing herself for her family, and wanting to force her to marry a man she cannot love, for their sakes? If I condescend to use a few woman’s wiles, I can make Hubert do anything I please. But I have thought of myself instead of the others, and now I am being punished for it.”

The longer the waiting had lasted, the more bitter her self-reproaches had grown, until, in wandering from the warmth of the reading-room into the freezing atmosphere without to look after Mamy, she had caught sight of the distorted outline thrown by Hubert’s shadow as he crossed the courtyard, and had run to meet him with such unfeigned joy in her manner that his dark face had been momentarily transfigured. Under the eyes of all who might happen to be present, she had flung down the steps, crying out, “Oh, Hubert, are you there at last?” She all but threw herself into his arms. Even upon the supposition that he was being fooled, such fooling was sweet to a man who possessed a voluptuary’s soul imprisoned in a deformed body. Hubert, however, had hardly had time to respond to his beautiful cousin’s effusions, for Mamy had run forward with frantic inquiries for Dick, and he had been obliged to give an explanation of his own proceedings. He had been to the Boulevard de l’Observatoire, he said, where Mrs. Clare and Truca were waiting in great uneasiness. He had told them he had the best of reasons for believing that Dick was all right.

"I suppose it was because you were waiting for Dick that you did not come to us?" Eila interrupted, fixing her dark eyes upon him with caressing anxiety. He had never seen this particular expression in them before.

"Yes, I was waiting for your brother," Hubert said, looking at her intently. Was it possible that she had really been anxious about *him*? "I was going to send a message by him that you were on no account to wait for me if I did not turn up with my friend here by eight o'clock."

"It was past eight before we got into the station," interposed Jack; he was feeling much discomposed at the sight of the fair little girl's tears. "And you've lost a brother, it seems," he added, turning sympathetically to Eila. "Is he quite a little chap?"

"N-no; he's g-grown up," said Mamy, sobbing.

"Oh, then he's bound to be all right," said Jack, smiling.

"I suppose it's not the first time he's been late for dinner, is it?"

Treated in this way, Dick's disappearance seemed a little less tragic than the sisters had supposed, though Eila replied with a grave sadness:

"But he promised to be back by seven. He might have been sure we should not have gone to the restaurant without him."

"You're bound to find him when you get home," said Jack, with assurance. "But if you shouldn't, we'll soon be on his track, take my word for it. I hope you'll let me know, for I want to be one of the search-party; and I promise you we'll bring him back to you all right. I might as well be making myself useful as loafing about the streets, for I've nothing to do in Paris but amuse myself. I mean," he explained, "that I've got all my time on my hands."

"But we don't know *where* to look," wailed Mamy. "We can't think of any place Dick could have stopped at between here and home."

"Oh, you mustn't suppose your brother tells you the names of all his acquaintances, Miss Clare," observed Jack demurely. "Hadn't you better let me call a cab for you now? And I'll follow you to your place in another. Then,



if your brother hasn't turned up, you can just let me know, and we'll get the police to help us without loss of time."

Mamy turned pale at the mention of the police, and Hubert silently signed to Eila to follow him.

"Wait for us a moment," he said to Mamy, who was preparing to come as well; "I have a word to say to your sister."

"I will take care of Miss Clare," said Jack promptly, and Mamy was fain to remain behind. Eila meanwhile was following her cousin with trembling apprehension. Hubert preceded her in grim silence to the reading-room, making no response to her breathless inquiries until he had led her to a comparatively secluded corner, where he obliged her to seat herself upon an unoccupied divan, drawing forward a chair for himself opposite to her.

The formality of these preparations increased Eila's alarm.

"There is something you have not told me," she cried, feeling sick with terror. "You know what has happened to Dick, and you won't tell me."

Hubert's dark, enigmatic face did not convey either affirmation or negation.

"Tell me," she cried imploringly, laying her hand on his arm; "what reason can you have for torturing me, Hubert?"

"I don't want to torture you," he said in embarrassed tones; "that is just the difficulty: I don't know how to avoid it."

"Is it such bad news?" she whispered, and her face grew livid. "Is Dick dead?"

"Dead? No; very much the contrary, I fancy."

The almost scornful tone of the reply brought the colour back to her cheek with a rush. "Thank God (if there *was* a God) for that." But why did Hubert adopt so heartless an attitude? What was there to mock at in his sister's tears?

"Is he hurt, then?"

"Not that I know of. Not bodily, at least——"

"Not bodily," she sighed impatiently. "Oh, Hubert,

what satisfaction can it be to torment me when I am in such awful anxiety? Something *has* happened, and it concerns Dick, and you won't tell me what it is."

"Because I'm sure of nothing myself, and I don't know how you will take the news, only I have a strong suspicion that Master Dick is neither more nor less than a thief."

"A what?" she repeated, bewildered.

"A thief!" He reiterated the word harshly. "It is a curious coincidence that a roll of napoleons I put by in your brother's presence this morning should have disappeared this afternoon, and that he himself is nowhere to be found."

A silence as of death followed this announcement. Raising his eyes, Hubert saw that his beautiful cousin's face was suddenly transformed. It was no longer white as when she had fainted at the Folies-Fantassin. A gray horror had overspread it, making it as leaden in hue as the face of a two days' corpse; and all living warmth seemed to have fled from her cheeks. Doubtless the cold she had endured while waiting outside had contracted the facial muscles, but only a spiritual chill could have changed so utterly the expression they rendered.

Those who suffer a tremendous bodily shock, like the victims of a railway accident, are never able to describe the sensations that immediately follow the blow. A paralysis of the very nerves and centre of feeling are the first merciful consequence, to be followed—alas, how soon!—by the re-awakening faculty for extremest suffering. The immediate effect of Hubert's words had been to aim a blow at the most sensitive part of Eila's organization, that inborn, ingrained sentiment of family love and pride which was the dominant quality of her nature. At first she was simply stunned, but as the full significance of Hubert's accusation dawned upon her slowly, the acutest misery she had ever been conscious of feeling overcame her. Not even the moments of frenzied terror that had marked her escape from the clutches of her lunatic husband were comparable in misery to those she experienced now. Could she have brought herself to recall this phase of cruel mental anguish at a later time, she might

have wondered how so many forms of torturing conjecture could hold one poor helpless human mind in their grasp at one and the same time. Dick was innocent; of that she could no more doubt than that the sun was fire. But the accusation brought against him made her wince as though she had seen the red-hot brand of a criminal pressed hissing against his smooth young flesh before her eyes. He was innocent. She and God—if, once more, there were a God—knew that. But supposing Hubert refused to believe it. Or supposing, again, that Hubert should be a fiend—an arch-villain, like the Lucifer of which he was so apt a counterpart—and that this accusation brought against her brother should be the result of some deep-laid plot to get all the family, herself to begin with, into his power. Yet how monstrous and unnecessary such a scheme would be! Had she not made up her mind that as long as Hubert was good to the others, as long as he gave them the wherewithal to nourish themselves with, she would do and be whatever he chose to make her—his *thing*, like Beatrice in Shakespeare's comedy. For an instant she felt nothing but a wild desire to fling back the accusation in Hubert's teeth, and spurn all the benefits, past, present, or to come, that the family might owe to his bounty—to escape with Mamy into the street and look for poor, ill-used Dick, to confront him there and then with their cousin, and to force Hubert to retract with abject apologies the hideous charge he had made. Alas for these heroic resolves! Had not Hubert purchased the right to treat the family as he chose? What could their defiance of him lead to but his desertion of them? And what would be left them then but the octagonal blue bottle that haunted Eila's dreams, as the vengeful vision of the Holy Grail haunted the erring Lancelot? The eyes she turned towards her cousin as she came to this politic conclusion were like those of an animal at bay. More eloquent than any words was the expression of trapped and helpless misery they conveyed. Hubert continued rapidly, though in softer tones:

"I have not the least doubt myself of what I say, but there is no necessity for you to tell your mother. I have only told you because I want you to know that there is good

reason to believe your brother has come to no bodily harm. But he has got into bad hands. I need not say there is a woman in the case." The words were accompanied by a sneering laugh of Mephistophelian significance. "There always is. But your brother is a young fool. I don't look upon him as a deliberate criminal. I mean to find him and bring him back, and if he is not frightened out of playing the burglar for the rest of his days, it will not be my fault. What you had better do now is to go home with your sister. You may tell your mother that I know where Dick is; tell her that he has got into a scrape, and she must wait until I get him out of it. Do you understand?"

There was certainly a warrant for asking the last question, for the stony despair that had settled upon young Mrs. Frost's face made it look more like an uncomprehending mask than the countenance of a listening human being. A reply of some kind, however, was necessary, but how was she to frame it? The mere physical anguish she felt in the muscles about the throat when she essayed to speak forced her to temporary silence. At last the agonized words, "It is a mistake—it can't be! If it were as you say, there would be nothing left—but to kill ourselves," came forth in half-stifled phrases, pronounced with cruel difficulty. Hubert could not have said whether sobs or mere hysteric gasps interfered with their utterance. Either pity or anxiety to ward off a possible scene, an unpleasant contingency in a public place, with a hunchback man and a beautiful woman for the actors, prompted him to say, in tones of reassuring firmness:

"I thought you had more self-control, Eila, or I would not have spoken to you about the matter at all. What I want you to do is to help me, and to reassure your family. I think your brother has been tempted to take the money by a woman. Perhaps she made him believe it would be returned. He is simple enough to believe anything. But he is *your* brother, and that is enough for me. His fate will depend upon yourself; you may go home now with the certainty that he is in no danger. I am going to find your sister, and I need not warn you to repeat nothing to her of what I have told you."

Jack's efforts to pacify Mamy had been more successful than those that Hubert had attempted in the direction of her sister. The young man's logic might be at fault, but his certainty was so unassailable and absolute that it inspired the confidence of a kind of inspiration. After five minutes' parley with him, Dick's escapade had begun to assume the proportions of a natural and almost an inevitable incident in Mamy's eyes, the only wonder being that Dick had waited so much longer than other brothers to absent himself some fine night without rhyme or reason from the maternal roof.

A cab was soon found. The Bacchante's ghastly expression did not escape Mr. Wilton's observation as he put the sisters inside. Hubert forbade the notion of following the girls home, declaring that he had found a clue to Dick's whereabouts, and replying to Mamy's eager string of inquiries by the oracular words, "I know what I know. Your brother is in no danger. But I must help him out of a little scrape he has got into before you can see him home again."

Mamy clung to her cousin's arm imploring to be told more. But despite Hubert's refusal, the relief of driving home with even the half-assurance that he had given her was so enormous that she found her spirits and her voice together. But Eila was deaf to Mamy's observations. She was deaf to all, indeed; save a sentence of Hubert's that rang in her ears in the darkness as she drove home with Mamy. Hubert had placed the money to pay for the cab into her hands at parting as he bade her good-night at the door of the vehicle, while Jack was speaking to Mamy on the other side.

"Your brother's fate is in your hands," he had repeated to her in low tones, and Eila knew in her heart what was implied in his words.

Had the sisters been possessed of an invisible coat of armour, one of them at least might have found her burden greatly lightened if she could have followed Hubert an hour later into his room. For there she would have seen him draw forth a letter addressed in Dick's large unformed hand, and read it, apparently for the second time, by the light of a candle standing on his chest of drawers. She might have

taken comfort, too, from the half-contemptuous amusement portrayed in his eyes as he read. Greatest comfort of all, however, would she have found in reading the letter itself, couched in the following terms :

“DEAR SIR: Adèle —, to whom you introduced me, is to be turned out of her rooms into the streets if she cannot pay a debt of twenty pounds contracted for helping her brother. The man is waiting to turn her out, and he will not listen to me. I know if you were here you would lend me or give me the twenty napoleons that are to save her from ruin. I have waited as long as I dared, and now I am going to take the roll of five hundred francs from your drawer and run with them to Adèle. Not an instant is to be lost, or it will be too late. I know I have no means of paying you back, and that you can have me taken up as a robber if you choose. But there is one way in which I can pay the debt. You have said you would take me to Cologne with the others. Now, instead of going, I will stay and drudge at the meanest occupation—I will be a *chiffonier*, if nothing else turns up—until I have saved you the sum you would have spent upon me. Did not the body of the debtor belong to the creditor according to the old Roman law? Well, then, my body is in your possession. Put me to the meanest tasks. Try tortures on me if that is your pleasure. I shall not complain. Take the pound of flesh, and the blood, too. I *want* to pay my debt in any way you choose to suggest. I cannot go to my home for a day or two, and would rather not see my people until they return from the trip, but you will tell them I have come to no harm.

“It is not for Adèle’s bodily salvation alone that the money was required. When you sent me to her, you had no idea I should discover one of those rare and grand types of women who are capable of rising as high as they have fallen low. I use this expression of *fallen* because it is supposed to render the meaning I want to convey, but I don’t endorse it in the sense the world gives it at all. I have sworn to make Adèle worthy of herself, and even if I go to prison for it, my own conscience will acquit me.”

## CHAPTER XI.

## EILA IS ASKED TO PAY THE COST.

SUCH a night as Eila spent after hearing Hubert's revelation might be fitly described as a groping in the valley of the shadow of death. Her mattress on the floor was but a rack of torment. Not of bodily anguish (though to toss and turn about through a long sleepless night is physical discomfort of a kind that borders on suffering), but of utter mental prostration and humiliation. Bitter scalding tears coursed down her cheeks in the darkness as the whole miserable scene of the previous evening recurred to her. What if Hubert's accusation were really true—if Dick had really done the deed ascribed to him? But no—it could not be. Dick, with his lofty speech and high-as-heaven aspirations, to fall so pitifully low! Dick, who could talk with the tongue of men and of angels, to be denounced as a common cowardly thief! If it were indeed true, then he must be mad. How otherwise could he have consented, in one short hideous moment, to annihilate the dear early Dick they had all believed in and loved, and to substitute a low criminal in his place? Only a few years ago he would have been hanged for stealing Hubert's money. Her father-in-law had seen men hanged in Hobart in the old days for a less crime than this. And then the heartless cruelty of leaving his family to surmise that he had been killed! Thank Heaven, their mother did not know the horrible motive for his absence. To have the truth suspected at home would indeed have filled Eila's cup to overflowing. Bitter as the draught was, as long as she alone tasted the full flavour of its bitterness, she could put on a brave face under her anguish. But to see the others lowered to the dust by Dick's crime would have been more than she could bear. Again and again the vision of the octagonal blue bottle shaped itself before her fevered vision. Why was life given to us entangled with so much that corroded and spoiled it? If it were in reality the gift of a responsible Power—not a mere accident resulting from the working of blind forces—why was it not permissible to re-

turn it to the source whence it came ? No reasonable person could expect another to accept a gift against his will. As for herself, she was tired of struggling for the well-being of the family. Some power stronger than her own was perpetually fighting against her. When it was not poverty it was something more terrible still. As for Dick, if he were not mad, as she half dreaded, half hoped might prove to be the case, he must at least have cast off his family for ever. Had he retained but a spark of his former feeling for them he could never have acted as he had done. He would have paused before branding Mamy, upon whose marriage so much depended, as the sister of a criminal. Burning, unrelieving tears coursed down Eila's cheeks as the consequences of her brother's crime rose before her like avenging ghosts.

After a night passed in solitary weeping, it was easy to pretend a headache as a reason for remaining the following day in her darkened room, and hiding her swollen eyes from the commiseration of her sisters. She heard much fragmentary talk concerning Dick during the course of the morning through the half-closed door, and more than once her mother or Mamy crept to her bedside to make her repeat the assurance that Hubert had given her of his being bodily safe. At twelve Truca brought her a cup of broth from the restaurant, together with a letter that had been left by a man from the Hôtel du Louvre.

"Take away the broth, I can't touch it; and pull up the blind a little—quick!" Eila cried, eagerly snatching at the letter, unheeding of the dismay portrayed in Truca's face; the little girl had never in all her experience been treated so by her sister, and the rude rejection of her broth, in place of the loving kiss she had looked for, was an additional mortification. The letter was from Hubert, and Eila's face crimsoned as she read the few laconic lines in his clear, smooth handwriting, so utterly unlike the writer:

"Can you meet me to-day at half-past three, by Chapu's Jeanne d'Arc in the Luxembourg Gallery ? I have something to say that is not for the ears of the others; you may make your mind easy about your brother for the present,



and as regards his ultimate fate, the decision rests with yourself."

With herself! Eila trembled as she read these words. What would she not do to rescue Dick? She was a physical coward, it was true. Pain to others as well as to herself—the very thought and conception of it, even without the realization, made her sick at heart. Yet she believed that if Hubert had proposed to inflict some physical torture upon her as a means of purchasing Dick's salvation—such, for instance, as the wrenching out of her beautiful firm teeth or the racking of her supple joints—she could have braced herself to endure the martyrdom. Happily, such a contingency was not to be taken into account. Though there was something disquieting and mysterious in her cousin's personality, it was absurd to regard him in the light of a melodramatic monster. Nevertheless, as Eila made her hasty preparations for meeting him secretly, she suffered a severe strain of mental tension. Hubert was exacting upon the point of neatness. Despite her agitation, she was careful to tie her small spotted veil as neatly as possible over the little Marie Stuart bonnet, and even to sew a missing button on her glove with shaking hands. The veil hid the traces of her morning tears, and she hurried through the reception-room with the announcement that she was going to air her headache on the boulevards.

But Mrs. Clare and Mamy had gone out, and Eila knew that they were seeking for a clue to Dick's whereabouts. Though it was hardly past the half-hour as she entered the Luxembourg Gallery, Hubert was there before her. The sight of his figure in a public place never failed to awaken a pang of pity in her breast. She hurried towards him now by a side-passage between the statues, hoping to make it appear that she had not seen him from far off; but her feint was unsuccessful. The piercing eyes surveying her over the double eyeglass from beneath the rugged brows conveyed a mute comprehension of her manœuvre in their saturnine expression, and Eila felt almost too intimidated to speak. "I am not late?" was all she found breath to

utter, in a tone that conveyed more of apology than affirmation.

"No; and if you are, we have plenty of time," he said composedly; "the gallery is open until five."

She followed him silently, as he continued to examine the statues and busts around him. The contrast between the idealized marble forms and the grotesque mould in which Nature had cast him impressed her so painfully that she hurried past sculptured gods and dancing nymphs with downcast eyes. Hubert seemed resolved upon prolonging the penitential promenade without regard to her feelings; but at last they found themselves in the long picture-gallery that runs at right angles to the hall of sculpture. Eila was wont to turn in here at odd moments of the day, and could have found the way to her favourite pictures blindfold; but now the luminous reflection from past Diazes and modern Duezes had lost its charm for her. She might, indeed, have been walking in the catacombs under her feet, for all she saw of the pictures. Hubert made a feint of being entirely absorbed in them, pausing before the balustrade with his hands resting upon the bar, and critically examining each painting in turn.

"He is doing it to torment me," thought Eila to herself; "he *is* like Quilp, after all."

Her anxiety for news of her brother was overwhelming, but she shrank from the terror of hearing his name coupled with the word "thief." Whatever horror the idea of Dick's crime might inspire, he was, after all, of her own flesh and blood, one of the sacred band, and the thought that this man by her side had the power, nay, perhaps the will, to brand him with lifelong infamy was unendurable to her. But Hubert seemed to have forgotten the object which had been the ostensible motive of his sending for her. He had halted, for what appeared to his victim an interminable time, in front of Cormont's mighty canvas, looking with grim satisfaction at the wonderful scene depicted thereon. Here we see the wild descendants of Cain, hawk-nosed and tawny-haired, sweeping fiercely on their restless tramp through the desert. The curse which impelled them to fly before the

face of the Lord is interpreted with terrifying realism. Mighty hunters are they, with the bleeding fragments of the wild beasts they have slain dangling in ghastly proximity to the half-clad women and children borne along upon a litter. In her normal state Eila would have gazed at this picture with the bright fresh interest all works of art aroused in her, delighting in its realistic and imaginative power. To-day it impressed her differently. Cormont's masterpiece only seemed to emphasize the dreariness of human destiny from the beginning of the world. In the hunted children of Cain she seemed to see her own remote ancestors, to realize that the curse which rested on them had descended upon herself and her belongings. Perhaps Dick, poor Dick! had a forefather like these among the mountain tribes of India, whose raids he was now to expiate in a nineteenth-century gaol. Where, then, did individual responsibility begin and end, and if scapegoats and victims must inevitably be called into being, should we not rather pity than blame them?

Under the influence of these sombre reflections, Eila was turning away from her contemplation of the picture, when Hubert's voice recalled her:

"A fine painting, is it not?" he remarked suavely, "though there is a suggestion of sandy blight in the atmosphere I don't like."

His tone was interrogatory, and her reply betrayed the bitterness she was feeling.

"You know I am no judge of pictures, Hubert," she said wearily. "All I can see in this one is a reminder of how miserable we were doomed to be from the beginning. But if it is only for the pictures you came, I will ask you to let me go away. They want me at home, and I have not been well; indeed——"

Her lips quivered. She could have found it in her heart to cry for sheer pity of herself at this moment. Never had she felt more completely discouraged and forlorn. Hubert's manner changed. If he felt a secret sense of elation at the certainty that he had the beautiful Bacchante in his power, he did not show it. He assured his cousin courteously that

he had had no intention of luring her to the Luxembourg on false pretences.

"The fact is that I have a very important communication to make to you," he added. "You do look rather pale and tired, and as it may take somewhat long in the saying, suppose we go upstairs and find a seat in some empty room where nobody is likely to disturb us."

Eila mutely expressed her acquiescence.

Her heart was beating with loud apprehensive throbs as she followed him up the staircase. Feeling it flutter with a quick, irregular movement as she paused to take breath, she wondered in her inexperience whether this might be a symptom of heart disease—a preliminary, indeed, to the stopping of the heart's action altogether. She had heard of people dying suddenly in this way, and it seemed to her at this moment that their lot was one to be envied.

Hubert led the way to a square room terminating an oblong gallery. The few sober pictures against the walls—a green riverside with a flower-strewn meadow, from the brush of Daubigny—attracted few visitors. In the recess of the window was a bench upon which Eila seated herself with her face turned from the light. Hubert remained standing, his arm resting upon the balustrade that guarded the pictures.

In this position he could look down upon his victim, almost dominate her, for young Mrs. Frost appeared indeed like a trembling culprit before him. The sense of family solidarity, the ruling sentiment in her nature, surged up within her in the presence of her brother's accuser. Her dark eyes assumed unconsciously an expression of resentful defiance. Hubert watched her for some time in silence. Then casting a furtive glance round the room to see that no one was in hearing, he addressed her in words so unlooked for that a shock of surprise was the first sensation they awakened. Surely they were the last she could have expected to hear from him at such a moment.

"Eila, have you cared for many men in your life?" he asked abruptly, though in low, softly-pitched tones, while his eyes seemed to question her inmost soul.

"No!" she replied wonderingly; "why?"

Her astonishment was great, but the feeling of being impelled by a will stronger than her own seemed to make her answer come of its own accord without any exercise of volition on her own part. She could almost understand now how criminals might be brought to avow a crime that it had been the object of their lives to conceal, for the sole reason that they were brought into subjection by the stronger will of the questioner.

"Do you care for anyone now, either here or in Australia?" Hubert insisted, still keeping his eyes intently fixed upon her.

"No," said Eila again; "no one."

Her voice sounded far-away and almost dreamy. She could not feel in her heart that she returned Reginald's love in kind. Rather, she let herself be loved by him, because she was in need of someone to trust and to lean upon. But she found the separation from him by half the world's circumference endurable enough, not hungering for his bodily presence, as undoubtedly he hungered for hers.

"You are a strange woman," was Hubert's next remark. "Now that the way is cleared, I may as well come to the end of what I have to say. But first of all you must let me warn you that I am taking it for granted that you are entirely without prejudices; you have led me to infer as much more than once."

He paused, and she interposed with, "What kind of prejudices?"

She felt the question to be a weak one, but her curiosity was aroused, and she would fain have obtained some notion of the ground upon which she was treading.

"Every kind," Hubert said, frowning: "religious, social, traditional, familiar—any name by which you choose to call them; received or preconceived notions of whatever sort. You are free of them all, are you not?"

"It depends," Eila made reply, "upon what you call 'prejudices.'"

The argumentative family instinct was beginning to assert itself. Her eyes lost their vacant look, and became earnest and interested as she raised them towards his.

"What I call prejudices!" he repeated after a pause for reflection. "Well, I should call a prejudice anything that prevented me from affirming my individuality whenever and however I may choose. There are ways, of course, with which the law interferes, and then one is helpless. I value my freedom too much to give the law a pretext for depriving me of it. Perhaps I was not always so wise. However, that has nothing to do with present affairs. I never run counter to the law now; the game is not worth the candle. Short of that, I have no law but my own inclinations. I thought you had much the same principle of action."

"Did you? Well, I am a kind of individualist, I suppose," said Eila, hesitating—"for myself, at least, because I would institute Socialism for the rest of the world if I could."

"A very convenient theory." Hubert smiled grimly. "Well, as it appears we are both individualists, I may affirm my particular form of individualism without fear of shocking you. There is one point especially in which mine differs from yours, that I should like to discuss with you. Instead of being a beautiful woman in the full heyday of her youth, I am—well, what you see." He hurried over the last words with sneering accents. "Yet, being what I am, I still cling to the illusion of introducing the element into my life that you seem to have put so quietly out of yours. You look astonished, Eila. Those very remarkable eyes of yours are easier to read than you suspect; it is a fact, all the same. For all the years that I have passed in exile I have never lost my hold of the vision that had to do duty for the reality. You see, the reality never came in my way—and if it had it would not have helped me much—never, that is to say, until I met *you*."

He stopped. She made no rejoinder, and Hubert continued passionately:

"I never dreamed of meeting such a woman as you. I should not have thought it possible. But having met you face to face, how could I ever fall back on my vision again? It would not be possible, however I might try. It must be you or nothing, Eila. Listen to me, and don't look from

side to side like a frightened bird. Those people are much more interested in studying the landscape upside down in the water than in watching *you*. When they see nothing else in a picture they can always appreciate the reflection. I say, again, it must be you or nothing. I am not going to mock you by asking you to bestow your love upon me. Don't be afraid of that. But you have assured me that you are heart-whole. I have watched you closely from the very outset of our acquaintance, and I am inclined to believe you. You have no one depending upon you, no social position to keep up, no children, no ties, none that matter, at least, no responsibilities of any kind: you are as free as air. Now, I admire you with an intensity of which you can form no conception. It is like a new life to me to be near you. What the hold is I cannot say. I suppose your beauty has the strongest share in it. Beauty-worship is my only religion, as you are aware. It is like the sun to a fire-worshipper. I have more than the ordinary masculine craze for it, for reasons which we need not go into now. Now, why should you not let yourself be worshipped by me in my own way"—his eyes seemed to contract with the intensity of the gaze he fastened upon her downcast face—"in exchange for the services I can render your family? There is Dick to be discovered, and—not punished, do you say? Helped, rather, into an honourable and paying berth. Nothing is easier, if one pays for it. Then you would like your other brother to be given a better billet, would not you? and have an annuity settled upon your mother and sisters, that would make you easy about them for the rest of their natural lives. You have the power to accomplish all this, and more, if you choose. What price are you asked to pay for it?—you will want to know. Well, nothing more than to be a little kind to me in my own way. My adoration of you in secret need not trouble anybody. I shall not proclaim it on the house-tops, I promise you, though there are men who in my place might like to figure as the ass that carried the image of gold. I want your permission to place you all in comfortable circumstances; that is all. You may say my action is unchiv-

alrous. I can't help that. I have my own views, and nothing can change my resolution. Let me say, too, that you are not likely to hear of your brother before you have honoured me with an answer. I have no desire to punish him for his clumsy theft, but there is no motive for my preventing the law from taking its course, unless you bid me do so. To-night it will be too late. Now, will you have a few moments to consider while I go and admire the landscape upside down in the river-picture? To save useless discussion, suppose you take it for granted, once for all, that my mind is irrevocably made up as regards the conditions. You will surrender yourself entirely, and trust to me to do what is best for the family, or the law will take its course, and I leave you and your belongings to your fate henceforth and for ever!"

He walked away; he had given her time to reflect, and she sat with her hands folded in her lap, her head a little bent forward, looking at the ground. It was curious that even at this crisis of her life she noticed the polished smoothness of the Luxembourg boards, and wondered whether they were waxed every morning, and whether one man did all the work alone. Her recent experiences in that line had given her almost a professional interest in floor-waxing. She wished she could force herself to think seriously over the question she had been left to decide. She wondered whether if her life and death had been in the balance she would have experienced the same kind of numbed, half-alive sensation she was conscious of now. It might be that condemned criminals did not really suffer so excruciatingly in their minds at the last moment, after all. But it was not about other criminals, it was about herself, she had to think. Let her reflect a moment. Hubert had proposed that she should put herself in his hands—or, in other words, that she should become his unaccredited wife; and in return for this concession he was prepared to liberate her brother, to place the family upon a footing of wealth and outward respectability, and to leave her, at least in appearance, to continue her home-life upon its ordinary footing. Looking at the matter dispassionately, was there



anything monstrous in the proposition? Though she was legally bound to her husband, circumstances had given her the most absolute freedom as regarded her movements. There was not a being upon earth whose rights or interests she would be damaging—as far as she could see at present—in pursuing the course suggested by Hubert. It would be a mere hypocritical pretence to urge that her husband would be injured by it—she had no husband. The man she had married existed no longer—would never exist again—and the poor lunatic who had taken his place, away in the asylum in the Antipodes, would be neither the better nor the worse for any use she might make of her freedom. Hubert himself had no ties. There was the objection, to be sure, that she did not love him; but, then, if she had loved him, where would have been the sacrifice? Was she not always urging upon Mamy the necessity of sacrificing herself for her family by marrying a man with whom she was not actually in love; and should she not herself practise what she preached, now that the opportunity presented itself? What behoved a person who loved her family was to do the thing that seemed most advantageous to their interests, putting herself and her own feelings entirely out of the question. Certainly some people might shrink from binding themselves by a secret chain, unhallowed by love, and from entering deliberately upon a life of deceit and subterfuge. But only let these people have a brother on the brink of being dragged to prison, and a mother and sisters who would go mad with grief—let them know what it felt like to see their belongings threatened with ruin and starvation, and then see how they would act. Life was made so easy for some persons, and so cruelly hard for others. But she would not complain if the rest were spared and she alone should be made the family scapegoat. There was even a foretaste of bitter triumph in the prospect of becoming their secret saviour and deliverer.

Another sentiment, not clearly defined or acknowledged even to herself, helped to bias Eila's mind. She foresaw vaguely that her power over Hubert would be a thousand-fold increased by her apparent abdication of it. By acced-

ing to his proposal she would hold him by every fibre of his being, and could make him do whatever she chose in behalf of the others.

Never was a bargain where two human souls were in the balance more coldly considered. Never did maiden on the eve of going to the altar with a wealthy and detested suitor count the cost more deliberately. Had Hubert returned at this moment, it is even possible that the unholy contract might have been sealed off-hand.

"Take me, Hubert," Eila would have sobbed out. "I don't love you, and I am *terrified* of you. But to have you do all you promise for the others, why, you might cut me in little pieces, if you chose."

Or, if she had not uttered these words, she would have thought them, and, acting upon the thought, would have made Hubert understand that she was prepared to accept his conditions without further parley. She would have taken upon herself the mission that Beauty assumed when she sallied forth, alone and trembling, into the garden of the Beast; that which devolved upon the unconscious daughter of Jephthah when she danced along with airy step to meet and greet her returning sire. And she would have justified herself by declaring that the sacrifice exacted of her was harder than that exacted from either of these doomed maidens. It was, indeed, upon her tongue to call Hubert back, and to whisper with white lips that she was prepared to pay the price he demanded of her. One consideration, and one only, made her pause—her promise to Reginald.

Poor Reginald! Eila's feeling about him at this moment was almost akin to anger. What right had he to claim her promise, with nothing but his love to offer her in exchange? Ah, if he could have sealed her lips with gold, as Hubert could have done, it would have been a very different matter. But the family might perish at his feet; he would be powerless to help them. Nevertheless, the scene of her parting with him on the moonlit heights of Cowa the night before her fatal departure recurred to her with sudden and startling vividness. Reginald's tone, his look, the prom-

ise she had given him to take no irretrievable step without consulting him, his almost prophetic foreboding of the thing that had happened to her now—all these considerations rushed upon her memory in one overwhelming flood. The simple force of a promise given, of an obligation that must be fulfilled before she was even free to act, rose clear and strong in her mind. And now softer recollections of the farewell interview intervened to make her pause. The impression of the parting scene seemed to grow in intensity. The silver sparkle of the bay at her feet, the misty glory of the mountain looming against the night sky, the dear familiar homestead whence the assured sounds of the collective family voice reached her across the moonlit strip of garden, her own fond and foolish anticipations of all she would see and achieve upon the enchanted soil of Europe, Reginald's absorbing self-effacing love and worship of her—the vision of this scene and its accompanying sensations rose vividly before her. Yes, she was bound by the most solemn of promises. Though all else might be dark, that at least was clear: to take no decisive step, to let no man gain possession of her until she had consulted her best and nearest friend. Hubert might place the knife at her throat, he might threaten to sever the hair which held the shadowy sword of Damocles suspended over her head, he should not make her break her promise to Reginald. Her momentary irritation against the latter was followed by a mood of remorseful penitence, coupled with the sense of a great deliverance. Whatever the future might have in store for her, Reginald had saved her in the present crisis. And now she must gain time to consult him before deciding for herself. The colour returned to her cheeks. She sighed as one who awakes from a nightmare, and seeing Hubert approach her, felt a sudden inspiration move her from without. She noticed that his hue was ghastly. This, however, was the only evidence of emotion he betrayed. He drew nearer. Neither spoke for a moment. Then he seated himself deliberately on the bench by her side, and laid his hat upon his knees. The air that enveloped them was heavy with warmth. Nevertheless, Eila felt her forehead grow cold as though

a hand of ice had been laid upon it. No one was in sight.

"Well?" said Hubert at last interrogatively; and it seemed to her that there was a note of inflexible significance in the short, smooth-sounding monosyllable.

What power moved her to say the words she uttered in reply she could not have told. But it was a power that seemed distinct from herself. She felt as she uttered them that they were the most fitting she could have employed, and that if she had spent days and nights in thinking over them, she would not have found any to serve her purpose better.

"Hubert," she began, and very soft and sweet the name sounded in her utterance of it, "you and I are not in the least like ordinary people, so I am going to speak to you not like an ordinary person. I am not offended by anything you have said—only don't you think the thing you have been proposing sounds rather a cold-blooded arrangement? You say that you have taken it for granted that I have no prejudices, and there you are right. I know I have often thought, if I could begin my life over again, I should not care to be bound to the man I loved by any other tie than the one of mutual inclination; unless, of course, there were the question of children and their interests to consider. But holding those views, I could not feel hurt by your wanting me to care for you altogether, situated as we are. Only while you were walking about just now I thought the matter over, and I found that I *was* hurt and wounded. Shall I tell you why? It is because, instead of trying to win me by being as you have always shown yourself until now"—this was the most insidious form of flattery that could have been employed—"you threaten me all of a sudden that, if I do not do as you want instantly, you will revenge yourself on the family. I don't believe you meant what you said. You only wanted to try me. I would not insult you by even supposing you were in earnest, or that you would be capable of using your power over poor miserable Dick as you say. What would be the object of using force? Why should you not make me care for you by fair means? Talk

to me reasonably, and give me a little time to reflect. I have been so grateful to you all this time, Hubert—you can't think. I have been wanting for ever so long to find an opportunity of proving my gratitude and—and—affection. Don't spoil everything so needlessly. It is such a pity. If you care about me as you say you do, surely I am worth waiting for a little. To hold me to the terms you proposed would be to treat me like a Circassian slave, or one of the worst of the Luxembourg grisettes. And I have done nothing to deserve it, indeed. I thought you understood there were things that had no value unless they were freely given."

She paused, waiting for his reply. Hubert did not look at her as he framed his answer. Her stately, well-poised head seemed almost out of reach of his lowering eyes. He kept his face averted and spoke with passionate rapidity:

"Your reasoning is clever, Eila—too clever. It is not the true expression of what you feel. You only want to gain time. All that you say would be perfectly true as applied to other people. It is not true of us. If I were an 'ordinary man'—as you said just now—if I were free of the accursed deformity that has ruined all my life, I would not speak to you as I have done: I would trust to winning you by gentler means. But that is out of the question. It is against Nature that you should feel for me as I feel for you. Whether now or later, our union must be a violence done to your instincts. But herein lies my sole excuse. I have a presentiment that, once you are wholly mine, I can make you fond of me. It sounds outrageously fatuous, doesn't it? But I maintain my point, notwithstanding. You are like a person who is asked to take a leap over a precipice. As long as you linger on the edge, you will shrink from the prospect with terror and horror. But once the leap is taken, I swear to you that you will have no cause to regret it. If I tried to drive you over by unfair means, you must not be too angry with me. It was for your sake as much as my own. I am so certain of being able to make your life a happy one. The present position is not tenable. If I pass for a monster, I am none the less a man; and I love you

with all the accumulated intensity and passion of a man who has been starved of love all his life."

"What a number of different ways of loving there are!" interrupted Eila reflectively, her mind reverting to Reginald's vows of utterly disinterested fidelity. "Tell me truly, Hubert, would you marry me if I were free?"

"Would to God you were!" he said fervently. "Would you marry *me*? That is more to the purpose."

"I would soon answer you if I were," she replied quickly.

There was no direct affirmation in her words, but he caught at the assent implied in them.

"That is all I wanted to know," he said. "There are women without end who pretend to be horrified at the notion of free marriages who would yet sell themselves without scruple under cover of the Church. But you are not one of those. If you were to send me away, it would be simply because I am repugnant to you."

"Oh, no—no! Don't say that!" she cried. "It isn't that at all. It is for the sole and simple reason that I gave you. I want time to get used to the idea. If you had asked me to marry you, I should have said just the same. I should have begged you to let me think over it for a little. It could not inspire confidence in a person to hear him say as you did, 'You must come to me at once—this moment—or I will leave you and all your belongings to starve!'"

He made an impatient gesture of denegation.

"You don't understand; I can't bring you the conviction I want until you have trusted me, and that is why I am so intolerant of delay. As things are now, I have the constant terror of losing you before my eyes. It makes me feel almost like a devil sometimes. Once I am sure of you, my sole object in life will be to make you rejoice that you consented to listen to me. I will refuse you nothing. What do you most desire in all the world for your brothers and sisters? I will be your slave of the lamp, ready to do your secret bidding, and no one in the world will suspect where your magic cave lies hidden."

She shook her head with a doubtful half-smile.

"People would know, all the same; and there are things that even you could not do. Supposing that I were ambitious for Mamy, and that I cherished a dream of seeing her figure in fashionable society?"

"The easiest thing in the world with money," declared Hubert promptly. "We would give her the income of an imaginary fortune in the background, and find some impecunious old dowager to present her at Court, and take her to balls and parties in the season. Is that the summit of your ambition for your sister?"

"No; I would rather she had singing lessons, and I only wanted to see what you would say. Hubert"—she turned towards him suddenly with a pleading gesture—"you will let Dick come back to us to-night?"

"That is as you choose," he replied doggedly; "you know the conditions."

"Oh, don't say that!" she cried piteously. "Don't use your power over me so cruelly. Indeed, it is for your sake, as much as for mine, that I want you to give me time. To force me like that would be to spoil everything. Let things remain as they are for a little bit longer. Don't you want me to be fond of you, too?"

"You fond of me!" he repeated incredulously. "Why, what new 'Midsummer Night's' miracle would you tempt me with, Eila?"

"It would not be a miracle at all," she answered earnestly. "Already I could worship you for all you have done for the family. I don't care whether it was for me you did it or not. The good to them was the same. It would not take such a *much* longer time before I was ready to prove my gratitude. I should want to prove it. But there are things one cannot do all of a sudden. I don't know why I should feel so. But it almost seems as though it would *kill* me, if you refused to give me a little time."

"You could not plead more vehemently if you were pleading for your life," he observed with a touch of bitterness.

"Oh, but you frighten me so!" she said in childishly quavering accents, "when you speak as you did a few

minutes ago ; I feel then as though there were nothing left to appeal to, and it makes me desperate. Besides which I am really tired. So many ups and downs do tire one so." She broke off to wipe her eyes apologetically, and continued : "One never seems to be able to think properly when one is so upset—only you don't want to make me afraid of you, do you, Hubert ? You would rather it was out of gratitude and trust, and—and—fondness than for any other reason that I was willing to go to you in the end ? It would be all so different then."

She stopped short once more. It would have been difficult for her at this instant to define the limit of the true and the false in her appeal. To let Hubert escape was ruin, hopeless and irretrievable, yet her soul revolted at the notion of becoming his mistress. Her only hope of salvation lay in gaining time. But if Hubert should suspect that there was a hidden motive in her urgent prayer for a delay, he would be merciless in the conditions he imposed.

No condemned criminal, pleading for a respite at the eleventh hour, could have attached more value to every moment won than she. Nor were her prayers entirely in vain. If Hubert had sought in the first instance to storm the citadel, it was with the foregone conclusion that it would never yield to pacific measures. But upon the bare possibility that it might surrender of its own accord, he was prepared to be generous as regarded the terms of the capitulation.

After the interview was over, Eila marvelled at the craft with which she had conducted her own defensive operations. Dissimulation is the legitimate arm of weakness, but she could not have believed that it was in her to handle the unaccustomed weapon so adroitly. Looking back upon the part she had played, it seemed as though Hubert had fallen into the trap she had laid for him with a naïveté worthy of a guileless devil of mediæval legends, who is represented to us as continually fooled and overreached by the mortals he seeks to ensnare. The trap was the implied possibility that she might train her heart to surrender itself in the end, provided due time was allowed her for the operation. This point conceded, the limit of time only remained to be fixed. A rapid



mental calculation of the space in which a letter could be sent to Tasmania and an answer received, allowing for possible delays in the interval, was gone through before Eila pronounced herself upon this point. But, like the dealers who demand the highest price for their wares with a mental reserve of what they will accept as the lowest, she began reflectively :

"One hears of very long engagements sometimes, doesn't one ?"

"One does"—there was a half-scornful, half-amused note in Hubert's assent—"but the obstacles are not supposed to come from the lovers themselves. In our case there is no reason why the date of our unofficial union should be delayed. You shall have the trousseau of a princess after, instead of before the ceremony."

"Oh, don't say that, *please!*" she protested in a pained voice, her face suffused with a crimson flush; then, diffidently: "Are you so tremendously rich, Hubert?"

He laughed.

"What would you say if I told you I had Aladdin's cave in the mountains of Australia? It is true, but I have sworn that no living person shall say 'Open, sesame' to it save one. So far I have only opened it a very little way. When you choose to use the magic password, you may tumble out the treasures at your pleasure. Tell me, Eila, when will you give me the joy of hearing you say it?"

She was silent. Confused thoughts of making him devote the bulk of his money to some grand philanthropic purpose, refusing all but a modest competence for herself and her belongings, were surging up in her mind. Surely if there were any moral blame attached to the selling of herself, the blessing of thousands of her unknown fellow-creatures must help to condone it.

"When is the 'Open, sesame' to be pronounced?" he continued, seeing her hesitate. "But I am not going to urge you any more after what you have said, though to remain here in this state of uncertainty, seeing you every day, is out of the question. I will leave Paris to-night"—he saw her face pale with a sudden apprehension—"but

you shall have my address, and wherever I may be, you can recall me by a word. The signal I told you of will be sufficient. When you are ready, telegraph those two words, 'Open, sesame.' I shall know what they signify, and I will come at once. By leaving you now I shall be giving you the best proof that I have no intention of taking undue advantage of the situation, as you accused me of doing a few moments ago. Furthermore, I will send your brother home to you, and leave it to his own conscience to punish him for his ingratitude towards me. As for you, Eila, you and your belongings will only be in the position in which I found you—neither better nor worse. I take my solemn oath that whenever you send me the password we have settled upon, I will make your family rich for the remainder of their lives. Meanwhile let there be no mistake. To write to me would be useless. I will not answer your letters. There is only one summons I shall answer, and that will be in person. I shall leave for London to-night. Telegraph to me at the Bank of New South Wales when you are ready to enter the enchanted cave. Wherever I may be, your message will bring me to you instantly. Should I die, you will be informed of it. And now good-bye; you will neither see me nor hear of me again unless . . . But I will not repeat what I said just now. Yours is not the childish intelligence to which repetition brings conviction. You know that every word I have uttered is the absolute and final expression of what I feel and of what I intend to do. I have given you your password; it only remains for you now to use it."

"But why need you go at all?" urged Eila, in a low voice; "you cannot say it is my fault if you take yourself away from us like that. All I asked for was time to think over the plan you proposed."

She brought out the last words jerkily, after hesitating painfully in quest of them. She could not forget that Hubert's departure would mean an immediate cutting-off of supplies. She would have liked to persuade him to remain until she had found at least a solution or a compromise, or, rather, until such time as, unknown to him, she had com-

municated with Reginald and received his reply. But Hubert was obdurate. It was evident that he intended to reduce the garrison by starvation, having failed to achieve its capitulation by gentler means. The shadow of the Future seemed already to loom before Eila with eyes of spectral hunger.

"I do wish you would not go," she pleaded once more, as he grimly extended his hand in leave-taking. "We shall feel so—so *lost* without you."

This appeal was undoubtedly genuine, but it had the contrary effect of fortifying the person to whom it was made in his resolution. Hubert was not acting upon the impulse of the moment. He had considered deeply the plan of action into which his departure entered as a consequence of his beautiful cousin's attitude. In his own mind he did not give her many weeks to hold out against his abandonment of the family. The most impolitic thing, as it seemed to him, would have been to remain by her side at present. As long as he was at hand and she could be sure of obtaining what she wanted for her belongings—he had long ago discovered that she took first thought for them and second for herself—she would find a thousand pretexts for delaying to give him a definite answer. He had but small faith in the efficacy of personal influence in his own particular case. Propinquity, which Miss Edgeworth makes so powerful a factor in the bringing about of marriages, had been given a fair trial. Absence, and the withdrawal of all the benefits that his presence conferred, might prove more effective. Let the beautiful Bacchante feel for a second time the pinch of poverty, let her find herself constrained once more to apply the dieting process to her mother and sisters, and it would not be long before the cabalistic words—so meaningless to all save himself—would summon him back to her side, never, please Heaven, or the other place, to leave it again.

In reply to Eila's renewed appeal, he pulled the Rubens cloak resolutely over his shoulders, throwing the long fold over the hump with a leftward gesture of the right hand that signified resistance unto death. In vain she essayed to

make him listen to her pleading. He cut her short with the same inflexible words :

“You know my conditions. Nothing can alter them. You have three months to think it over.”

And before she had bethought herself of recasting her petition in another form, he was gone.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### EILA'S LETTER.

WHILE Eila moves about in a white and wintry world, Hobart is basking in the radiant glow of an Antipodean summer. Mount Wellington wears his summer robe of purple-hued velvet, and even upon the topmost peak of his lofty head no trace of his winter crown is visible. The little Sandy Bay cottage is almost hidden under the trailing embrace of roses, convolvuli, and jessamine, and the cherries hanging in profusion to the boughs are red and ripe to bursting-point.

Upon one of the loveliest of these lovely summer evenings, Reginald was walking up and down the gravelled path of the cottage garden between the thyme-borders, with his dog at his heels and his pipe between his lips. Every time he turned his face seawards his gaze rested upon the *Queen of the South*, lying in dismantled state with bare masts against the Hobart wharf. He had hardly waited for the vessel to cast anchor before he had boarded her, and with the aid of Eila's ship-diary, which he had brought with him (quite unnecessarily, seeing that he knew every word of the manuscript by heart), had reconstituted the voyage of the Clare family almost day by day. He knew the exact spot where young Mrs. Frost had sat at table by the side of the first mate, and he even went to the trouble of reversing the swing-back of the bench in order that he might introduce himself into the identical place she had occupied. By cross-examining the bo'sun in a circuitous fashion, he was

enabled to determine in the same way the portion of the bulwarks upon which Eila had been wont to perch herself upon moonlight nights in the tropics. But most joyful discovery of all, upon the edge of the rough bunk she had occupied in the stern cabin, which upon the present voyage was filled up with a consignment of sausage-machines for a hardware dealer in Hobart, he found a capital R scratched with the point of a pair of scissors on the inner side. Eila had told him in her diary of this performance of hers, perpetrated upon a day when the heavy seas near the Horn had well-nigh swamped the *Queen*. It had been impossible, she said, to keep one's feet, and the cuddy was running with water. Against the ports there was nothing but the angry green of a boiling boisterous sea to be descried. It had been too dark in the stern cabins to read, and it was bitterly, bitterly cold. Eila confessed that her thoughts had wandered miserably enough in the direction of the octagonal blue bottle; and that to give herself courage she had traced with infinite pains the first letter of Reginald's name as she lay prostrate in her berth. He had never thought to find the precious memento. It was more than probable, he told himself, that it had been painted out when the *Queen* was overhauled previous to her departure for Tasmania. But there it was, and when, after displacing the sausage-machines without regard to the consequences, the young man discovered it, in the exact place that had been described to him, he committed the extravagance of hoisting himself on the berth for the sole purpose of pressing his lips to it. He would have liked, had he dared, to cut out the piece of planking upon which the R was traced and to carry it away with him. But no pretext for performing this act of mutilation occurring, he was obliged to leave it behind in the unsympathetic neighbourhood of the sausage-machines; only the ship's carpenter reaped the benefit of the discovery in the shape of an unexpectedly munificent tip.

Seawards, then, he beheld the *Queen* from the garden this evening, and the *Queen* meant Eila, and Eila alone. On the land side, as he paced backwards and forwards, he saw the mountain, and the mountain signified Eila, and none

but Eila. The mountain and the sea, the whole universe, indeed, was full of her presence. Yet what reward could he hope to reap from his constancy? The more he clung to Eila's image, the more he cherished it, the deeper the iron entered his soul. He would not have forfeited his love for all the gold of the Australias; but so far, instead of bringing him any happiness, it was the cause of a perpetual and heart-corroding anxiety. More than ever was he anxious now, for the news of the total failure of the insurance company, on which the Clare family depended for their sole means of living, had been confirmed only that very day. Hitherto he had hoped that something might be saved from the wreck for the families of the shareholders, and it was rather with a view to helping his friends in Paris to tide over the evil day occasioned by a temporary stoppage of supplies, than in the fear of their being left literally without a penny, that he had sent fifty pounds to Eila some three months ago. But now the disastrous certainty of their being left without any resources of their own was placed beyond a doubt, and Reginald was in no enviable frame of mind as he walked to and fro in the little thyme-scented garden. He could have cursed his poverty that kept him chained like some worn-out old steed to the same jog-trot round of daily duties, and that prevented him from rushing across the world to succour his love. Had it not been for his mother, he would have thrown up his employment upon the spot, placed the few hundred pounds he possessed in his pocket-book, and gone to Paris to pour them at Eila's feet. He felt as though he would have found the strength to rescue the whole family for her sake. They sorely needed a man with a practical head to take charge of them. He would have found an ally in Willie, the only one of the Clares whom he was inclined to credit with an ounce of commonsense, and Dick should have been made to work, if only as a house-painter. Reginald himself would have been responsible for the well-being of the rest, and it would have gone hardly with him, he thought, if he had not found the means of keeping a decent roof over their heads. What they would do now, Heaven only knew. His fifty pounds had probably saved them from going under

completely, but the little fund would soon be exhausted, and then what was to become of them ? He was earning himself a salary of some four hundred a year, and the greater portion of it was devoted to the sustenance of a paralyzed mother. Old Mrs. Acton required a special attendant of her own. It had also been Reginald's delight to surround her with every imaginable comfort he could devise for her. No empress could have had a softer couch or choicer wines. All the appliances that modern science has invented for giving a poor helpless body the delusion of being independent were purchased by him almost as soon as they appeared. The cottage spare-room was filled with automatic couches and reading-tables that had been supplanted one after the other by still later patented contrivances. A happy old lady was Mrs. Acton, despite her helpless limbs, for she lived in the belief that she occupied the first place in the heart of the best of sons. It was certain that her dependence upon him had intensified his filial tenderness. Constant contact with suffering and weakness acts upon different natures in very different ways. Some grow indifferent and callous ; others (and these are not necessarily the most unfeeling) become irritated and resentful. It is only a few rare natures that are able to remain constantly pitying and patient, and to remember that, if we can grow used to witnessing pain, it does not follow that the sufferers get used to feeling it. Reginald's was one of these rare natures. A sentiment that had once found place in his heart remained unchanged to the end. It is to be supposed that his antipathies were as steadfast as his sympathies, though he found but rarely the occasion for manifesting them. As he continued to walk up and down the thyme-bordered path turning the question of Eila's situation over in his mind, and pondering ways and means of helping her, the postman handed him a letter over the garden fence. Even before he felt it in his hands he knew whence it came ; these Paris missives did not arrive very regularly, though he would continue to hope against hope whenever mail-day came round. His heart throbbed now with an anticipation that was almost painful as he carried off his prize to the farthest extremity of the garden, like a dog with

his bone, before examining the contents. Despite all his philosophy, it jarred upon his nerves to be spoken to by anyone whomsoever when he was reading one of his Paris letters. Habitually he skimmed through them rapidly at a first reading, and it was almost a matter of regret to him that Eila wrote so clear a hand, for it deprived him of the pleasure of prolonging this preliminary examination. The next reading was more deliberate. Phrases were studied with reference to what was left unsaid as well as to what was said. The next perusal, and the next—Reginald could not have told you how many nexts—suggested numberless questions he would have to ask the writer when he came to answer her letter. Upon the present occasion it was a satisfaction to feel even before he opened it that the envelope was more than usually thick. Eila had already acknowledged the arrival of his fifty pounds with grateful outpourings that had moved and pained him as he read them, and this time she would possibly have something more to tell him about the mysterious hunchback cousin, whose discovery she had narrated in one of her former letters. He leaned against the trunk of a walnut-tree, surrounded by a screen of currant-bushes, and pulling his wideawake over his eyes, and sticking his pipe in a branch—he could not have committed the sacrilege of approaching a pipe to Eila's letter—proceeded to read as follows:

“DEAR REGINALD” (sometimes it was “Dear Friend”),

“I am going to write you the most curious letter a woman ever wrote to the man who cared for her, as I know and feel you do for me. From one point of view it will almost make you inclined to look upon me as a monster, but indeed I am the same Eila you knew at Cowa, the same about whom you said once that *nothing* she might do would take you very much by surprise—you remember saying that, don't you? The same, too, from whom you exacted a solemn promise that, in consideration of your love for her, she would tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, about herself, no matter what it might be.”



At this point in his reading it behoved Reginald to summon all his resolution. The dread of what was to come was so great that a mist seemed to hide the characters from his eyes. His fingers were trembling. He closed them fiercely round the paper and read on :

"Furthermore, that she would let nothing important happen in her life, and make no change in it of her own accord, without giving you due warning, and waiting to hear what you might have to say about it first."

The mist cleared away, and the reader gave unconscious vent to a profound sigh of relief. Let her say her worst now. He could brace himself to hear it. There was time still, for she had kept her promise to him, and he blessed her for it in his heart. The letter went on :

"I hardly know how to put into words the step I contemplate taking, or, rather, the fate that is hanging over me : for when I try to put it down in cold blood I seem to realize exactly the horror my conduct would inspire in other people. To say that I feel it is inevitable, and to resign myself to it beforehand, almost looks as though I were conniving at it, but indeed this is not so. It is simply that I cannot help myself. Of course I *could* escape my fate if I chose, but it would be at the cost of sacrificing five persons to one ; or, to speak the strict truth, *four* persons, for Willie *can* manage to keep his head above water in a way. Those four persons are my mother, and Mamy, and Dick, and Truca, and when I have told you this you will be prepared to understand a little better how it is that I shall be able to bring myself to accept the fate that is in store for me, without counting the cost. It is dreadful to be at such a distance from you, for I feel that I am tormenting you all this time by not coming to the point, and yet I can't summon up the courage to make my confession to you before I have put down all the extenuating circumstances."

Reginald's face grew grim again at this point. He was preparing to read eagerly on, when the sound of his mother's

voice, faintly calling to him from her bath-chair, which she had caused to be wheeled in his vicinity, reached his hiding-place.

"Reginald! Reginald!" it said, with mild persistency. "I shall say to you, like the rude boy in *Punch*, 'Is it from Frederic, or Frederica, my dear?' I never knew you so absorbed in a letter before. I want you to wheel me round to the kitchen door, if you please. If I don't warn Mary once more about putting your new merino vests into hot water, she will make them quite unwearable, just as she did the last."

Reginald came forward mechanically. There was an expression of such intense and suffering abstraction in his clouded blue eyes that even his mother, who had come to believe that she possessed the sole monopoly of exciting the sympathy of people who had the use of their limbs, could not fail to notice it.

"Tell me what has happened, Reginald," she cried, in a tone of alarmed curiosity, eyeing the letter suspiciously.

"Happened? Nothing!" He smiled down at her with an effort, thrusting the letter into his pocket as he spoke. "Let us go and save the merino vests while there is time."

But after he had wheeled the bath-chair to the kitchen door he found means to slip away without taking part in the discussion upon the merino vests after all, for when Mrs. Acton looked round to appeal to him, it was the sedate face of the attendant, and not her son's blue eyes, that answered her inquiring glance.

The invalid shivered, though the evening was very warm. It was not to be wondered at, perhaps, that a young man should occasionally find the company of a paralytic old woman somewhat tedious, even though the latter should be his mother. But if the writer of the letter he had been reading was able to make him happier than she could, why had he worn so pained an expression when he looked up from reading it, and why did he exclude his mother from his confidence?

Old Mrs. Acton would not have asked this question twice if she had been able to look over her son's shoulder as he

continued to peruse Eila's missive. I doubt, however, whether she would have read on after she had reached the point he had come to, and especially after a comprehension of the significance of the communication had dawned upon her. It is more likely she would have drawn the letter from her son's hands, and adjured him, as he valued his soul, to cease all intercourse with so utterly depraved a creature as the writer. She would not have understood, indeed, how depravity could go to the length of pleading its own cause in so shameless a fashion.

But she never knew what the mysterious epistle contained, for the reason that Reginald carried it beyond the walnut-tree this time. He carried it as far out of reach of his mother's voice as possible, to the lane behind the house, and it was only when he was out of sight and hearing of the inmates that he drew it from his pocket once more. No one being in view, he walked slowly on, reading as he went, and overwhelmed by the unconscious cruelty of the contents.

Eila could not bear to inflict pain. Yet her manner of beating about the bush before imparting the tidings at which she had hinted in the beginning of her letter was like torturing a patient with prods of the lancet before performing an operation upon him. His apprehensions increased with every line. He felt as though he were being dragged along the edge of a precipice before being hurled over it to (bottomless) perdition. "Why cannot she come to the point?" he said to himself resentfully; and he remembered the nick-names of "Jesuit" and "special pleader" that he had heard applied to her by her brothers and sisters at Cowa. She had always been a casuist. He remembered her telling him that when she was a child she had liked to take sides against herself with reference to every point she held for truth, and how it had often happened that the assumed opponent had been too strong for her, and that she had been obliged to leave untied the knot she had herself woven. She had also told him how she had discovered at a very early age that the frequent repetition of the same word will convert it into sound without sense, and how the discovery

had tempted her to make experiments that were not quite fair in her arguments with the family, and to entangle them in a mesh of words when she found she was losing the day. But surely she need not have had recourse to such a subterfuge in writing to *him*. He loved her. Was not that enough? She might tell him she had broken all the Commandments in a string. He must go on loving her in spite of all. Some men will love a woman for her beauty; others for her virtue; others for some abstract qualities which they find incorporated in her. Reginald loved in quite another fashion. No matter what might befall her, she would always be the same for him. If she should lose herself in the world's estimation, he would hate and execrate the evil chance or the weakness that had proved her undoing. But nothing could sully the image he cherished of her in his heart. But it was cruel of her to inflict this long preamble upon him. The sooner he knew what fatal step she was contemplating, the sooner he could devise a way of saving her from it. And she ought to have taken this into consideration when she wrote. The letter continued from the part where he had broken off :

"I wish you could be more reasonable about me, Reginald; it is the exaggerated kind of value you set upon me that makes it so difficult for me to tell you the particular kind of way in which I should have to sacrifice myself. If you did not feel about me as you do, I am sure I should think much less of the matter myself. I should try to remember the principle of the political economists, that the chief thing to be considered is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and that for one person out of six to come to grief, or what the world calls coming to grief, really matters very little if all the rest are saved."

"You see, it is on your account much more than on my own that I am so troubled. As far as my own feelings are concerned, I have really almost reasoned them into subjection. The experience we went through some months ago taught me a lesson I shall never forget. I would not tell you about it then, for you were too far away to help us, and

it could only have given you pain. But all our money was spent. Mother was ill, and I realized the horror of feeling that we might not know where to turn for bread in a few days, and that we should have to go through the degradation of begging for assistance (though I don't know where we could have applied for it). It was so awful that I cannot look back upon it now without shuddering. That time is like a black nightmare in my memory, and it was worse for me than for the others, because I did not let them know quite how bad things were. I made up my mind then that rather than go through such an experience again, or see Truca go to bed with the pinched, hungry look I saw once in her face, I would *sell myself*. After writing down these two words I have prepared you for the worst, and now you will be able to nerve yourself to hear me to the end, especially as I give you my solemn word of honour that I am referring to the future and not to the past, that I have taken no irretrievable step so far, and that I mean to keep my promise of telling you everything—*beforehand*."

The evening, as I have said, was very warm. The sun shone redly on the waters of the harbour as upon the night when Reginald had made Eila turn round to behold the glories of the sunset sky from the rugged heights of Knocklofty. Yet as he read this paragraph to the end the young man shuddered as though the chill of winter had descended upon him. Was it too late? Was the long preamble but a slow preparation for the inevitable fall of which an ensuing letter would bring him the hideous details? If this were so! If it were indeed too late! But it could not be too late. Had she not given him her word of honour in this very letter that she was the same Eila he loved and trusted, the same who had bound herself by a solemn promise to make no change in her life without consulting him? But the letter was written six weeks ago, and the writer had evidently been skirting the precipice when she wrote. She could not have approached much nearer without falling over altogether. But surely such a sacrilege could never have been permitted; the pity of it would have been too

tremendous. Eila, with all her beauty, her youth, her power, and her purity—her generous instincts, and her love for her belongings—to seek her place voluntarily among the outcasts of her sex! To ruin and degrade herself beyond redemption in the zenith of her sweetness and charm! A curse upon her exaggerated solicitude for her family! She had always carried it to a point that bordered upon insanity. Curses, too, upon her cheap estimation of herself and her attractions! What inexplicable delusion made her act as though her sole mission in life were to grovel in the dust and mud in order that her family might walk clean-shod over her body? If the hideous sacrifice should have been accomplished, the world would suppose she had bargained herself away for her own profit. None but he would know how in truth she had but one object in view, and that object was her family. But she had brothers. If they possessed the least spark of manhood among them, they would not suffer their sister to go to her destruction. Ought not two strong lads to be capable of working for their mother and sisters? But the vision of Dick in his sandals rose before Reginald's mind at this moment, and his discouragement returned afresh. He could not take comfort in the hope that Dick would be a staff to lean upon in the time of trouble, and it was with a sinking heart that he resumed once more the reading of his letter :

“ You have not forgotten the story I told you that night upon Mount Knocklofty about our cousin Hubert de Merle, and the ruby that ought to have belonged to mother which he had in his possession? I know you looked upon him as a mythical personage, and though you did not say it in so many words, I could guess from your tone that you thought we must be mad to expect to find him in Europe. Well, we *have* found him, and though nothing has been said about the ruby, he has taken us under his protection. From the day that he first came to visit us, the cloud of poverty has been lifted from our lives. We have had all the comforts and luxuries that rich people enjoy, and oh! Reginald, if you could know what it means to be poor and hungry in a

place like Paris, to be afraid to stir out of doors because your clothes are shabby, and to have people treat you almost as though you were a criminal, you would not wonder at our appreciating the difference in our position now. The thought of going back to our former misery is the nightmare of my life. I need not say it is not for myself that I mind. You know me well enough to be sure of it even without my telling you. You know that if I were alone in the world I would turn nurse or parlourmaid (I should not be fit for much else), and make a respectable livelihood. But no; I think I would come straight to you, and we would go off somewhere into the wilds, out of the reach of Mrs. Grundy, and build ourselves a little hut, and earn the right to live by the sweat of our brow."

A sudden flush suffused Reginald's face as he read these words. One cannot wish for the demise of an entire family without being a kind of potential Tropmann, but there is no crime in wishing that they might never have existed, and if the desire of Reginald's heart could have been realized at this moment, the writer of the letter he held in his hands would have been a foundling.

"But I am not alone," Eila continued, "and my one thought night and day is how to place the others out of the reach of want. Coming to Europe"—Reginald noticed she no longer spoke of coming "home"—"has taught me a great many things. It has shown me that we are really worth nothing as a family in the world, excepting to each other. We have no kind of marketable accomplishments or qualities. From what I have seen here of the struggle for life, one must have a talent for some particular kind of profession, or else one must remain among the unskilled on the lowest rung of the ladder. It is almost impossible to make a living if one has no vocation. Besides, it would kill my mother, or Mamy, or Truca, to be put to any sort of drudgery, even if they were capable of performing it. They do not need much to live upon, but what they have must be something they can depend upon, and it must leave them

free to go out and come in as they choose, and to be at nobody's bidding. Then Dick may have to practise his art for many years (and he is not even at the beginning of it) before he can hope to keep himself. You see now what our position is. The one thing we had to reckon upon, namely, the sum paid us by the insurance company during mother's lifetime, is gone. Even while we had it we could not manage to keep our heads above water, but now we should be literally beggars without our cousin. Your munificent and generous gift" (Reginald winced as he read these grandiloquent words) "would have been our salvation under other circumstances, but we should have come to the end of it in time. (Even as it is I am troubled by the thought that you may have deprived yourself of many things that are really necessary.) And when that money was spent, what was to become of us? The future lay black before us, like the coal-hole in infinite space we used to look up at in the Hobart sky. We had no plans and no prospects. The most likely thing to happen to us was that the family would be broken up, and that each one would make an attempt to earn a miserable livelihood alone. But we are all so awfully unfitted for regular or constant work of any kind. I could see only one means of salvation, and that was in Mamy's marriage with Sydney Warden. But Mamy is without pity. Sydney is not of age, and when his mother came to find we were utter paupers, standing on the brink of beggary, she would naturally do her utmost to prevent the marriage. Now you understand just how we would be situated if it were not for our cousin. Without his making any kind of definite proposals or arrangement, and simply upon the grounds of his being a connection and apparently very rich, it seems to have been taken for granted that we are to let him spend a small fortune upon us every day, take us to dine at grand restaurants, treat us to the theatre, make us drive out with him in a splendid carriage, and send us presents of money for clothes. This condition of affairs has lasted for some months. Poor mother quite believes that it is a tacit recognition on Hubert de Merle's part of the claims we have on the ruby. But he has spent the price of a hundred rubies on us already, whatever



mother may say to the contrary, and now he proposes taking us all for a grand tour through Europe. The others are beside themselves with delight. We were already making our preparations, when the awful news of the crash of the insurance company reached me, with your beautiful telegram and present, and I have been coward enough to say nothing of it yet to the rest. It would be too awful a wet-blanket in the midst of their joy. But the thought is ever present with me, that we are walking over the thin crust of a volcano. We have no earthly claims upon our cousin. Even our imaginary claims have been paid, and more than paid. Supposing he should suddenly tire of us, and turn his back upon us! I do believe in that case there would be nothing but the octagonal blue bottle to fly to. But no! I don't quite mean that. I can see your vexed look even while I write the words. But you will admit that our position would be as bad as it *could* be.

"Now, Reginald, I have been making this long explanation for no other purpose than to lead up to the conclusion which I have already hinted at in the beginning of my letter. It is given to *me* to be able to save the others, and to put them out of the reach of want once and for ever. I have had a presentiment of this all along, and now I have the certainty of it. Our cousin is not a Don Quixote. Neither has he taken such a fancy to the family all round as to feel that he must provide for us all to the end of our lives. He is what I vaguely suspected him to be from the beginning, a man with a fixed and unswerving purpose, to gain which he would sacrifice not one poor family alone, but the whole world, if it were in his power to do so, and if it could further the object he had in view.

"It is awfully difficult for me to tell you the price he demands for saving the family from poverty. More difficult in one way to tell *you* than any other person in the world, although you are so pitiful and *understanding*, and although, strangely enough, being my father confessor, you are the only living soul, save myself and the partner of my guilt (for that is the way in which it must be expressed), who will know anything about the matter. But I am telling

you without telling you, and oh, Reginald, do keep your pity and some little affection for me in spite of all. I shall be driven to accept my fate, because there will be no help for it. There is no way out of it, whichever way I look. Why is life made so hard for us? I do desire to walk along a straight path with all my heart, but things have been so dreadfully against us from the beginning. How can I let my mother and Mamy and Truca suffer cold and hunger? If I were not married, and Hubert were to propose to marry me (and you may believe on my sacred word of honour that this is the solution he would offer if I were free), I would not be looked upon as a depraved woman for accepting his offer, even though I could not possibly love him. It would be considered quite a meritorious action on my part to marry a deformed man with a great fortune and to enrich all my belongings. But if one looks at the matter in its true light—remembering that my marriage is really no marriage, and that I am free in fact, if not in name—there is no greater wrong in becoming Hubert's mistress than in becoming his wife. The wrong lies in the violence done to my own sentiment; but whether I sell myself with the sanction of the world or without it, the deed in itself must surely remain the same. In truth, when it comes to selling one's self, I almost think the offense to morality must be less if one does not ask the Law and the Church to ratify it.

"I am afraid you will think that I am tutoring myself weakly to accept an alternative which I might escape if I were to act differently. You will say, 'Eila was always a wretched creature without any backbone; why does she not appeal to her cousin's honour and chivalry, and make him feel that he is acting like a villain?' But oh, Reginald, if you knew Hubert de Merle, you would know how little such reasoning meant. He is not like other men. It is the one fixed, unchanging idea of a solitary and brooding life that he is resolved to carry out at all costs. And because it has never been realized, he is the more determined to put it into execution now. He would see one after the other of the family perish of hunger at his feet, and I with them, unmoved. I feel it when I am with him. He has put us under

even greater obligations than I knew of. It would take too long to tell you of them all. He even has Dick in his power, and can save him or lose him at his pleasure. He has told me that Dick's fate and the fate of all my dear ones rests with me, and is in my hands alone. If I listen to him he will have a proper act drawn up (you know I don't understand legal terms, but it would be something that a great firm of London lawyers would undertake) by which five hundred pounds would be paid mother yearly for the whole term of her life, and two hundred a year to each of the others. I have always thought—and really this is no pretence—that, if I could procure a certainty for the others like the one contained in Hubert's offer, I would gladly consent to die. Of course I should bargain for an easy death, for I hate pain. Every fibre in my body seems to shrink from it. But if I would accept actual physical death, why should I not accept the social death that an acquiescence in his plan would bring upon me? I know which course the family would prefer me to take if you were to ask them their opinion by turns quite independently of each other.

“I have thought the matter over until I seem to have no power of judgment left. I believe thinking of a subject too long and too intently must trouble our point of view about it, like repeating the same word over and over again. Both subject and word cease to have any meaning after a time. Sometimes I think what a wicked fool I must be not to close with the bargain at once. Between forcing Mamy to marry without love, and acting upon the same principle myself—without marriage—the last course would be much less wrong than the first. I have no position to lose, and my own feelings are much fainter than Mamy's. It could not be otherwise after the dreary experience of my first marriage. Before you give me advice, Reginald, try for pity's sake to put yourself in my place. Remember that there can be no scandal in taking the step I contemplate, and no wrong done to another. Hubert is free, and if I go to live with him after a time (for that is part of the contract) he would take me to some foreign place where I would pass for his wife, and be respected by the people about us. If I should

become a widow, or we can obtain a divorce, he would marry me. But meanwhile all I have been able to obtain from him is a few weeks' respite to allow me to make up my mind. And all this time the others are wondering why the journey they have been counting upon for so long has been delayed. If I say 'No' to Hubert's proposal he will abandon us for ever. He has told me so in a way that forces me to believe him. Then there would be nothing to look for but utter misery and shame. Indeed, I cannot face the thought of telling my mother that we are without a penny in the world, and that Hubert has left us to our fate. I might as well dole out the contents of the octagonal bottle at once, for to be left stranded in Paris would mean to die by slow starvation, and that is worse than poison.

"I told you I could not think clearly of the situation any longer, for the reason, I suppose, that I have thought of it too much. Hubert has placed the knife against my throat, as they say here when one is forced *nolens volens* to accept the conditions of the stronger party. The only definite notion I have clung to is my promise to tell you *everything* that concerns me. If it were not for you, the arrangement I told you of would have been carried out already. You will say I am a poor specimen of what a true woman ought to be. My feeling for Hubert should by rights be one of intense horror and loathing, but really it comes nearer to indifference than anything else. There is a vague wonder in my mind all the time at his attaching such a tremendous price to the doubtful advantage of annexing an indifferent woman; but I have given up trying to understand men's natures. They are so different from one's own. Even *you* are beyond my comprehension; I only know that if I were free I should feel quite safe and happy by your side, and it would be a relief to surrender my judgment to yours. I have come to the conclusion that I have no head for practical matters; and as for abstract ones, after all, Pilate's question is the only fitting answer to *them*.

"Now *good-bye*, Reginald—though it is not good-bye unless you choose it to be so; and, at any rate, when you receive this letter, there will be nothing that need hinder

your thinking of me as you say you like to recall me. If it were not that it would be cowardly and selfish to abandon the others to their fate, I sometimes think the solution of the octagonal bottle emptied by me alone would be the best and easiest, after all. One does get so tired sometimes of the contrariness of everything in the world."

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### REGINALD'S RESOLUTION.

FOR long hours after Reginald had read the foregoing letter, he remained outside in the soft evening air pondering over its contents. He had wandered down the lane as far as the beach, and found a rock that served him for a resting-place. Mount Wellington behind him had turned from purple to rose, and from rose to misty gray. The harbour had lost the flame-coloured reflection cast upon it by the sunset, and mirrored now a full-globed moon, whose rays lay spread like a silver shield upon the quiet waters. The sea-breeze was soft as a zephyr, hardly ruffling the smooth expanse of liquid light and shade. Only the lazy advance of the tide was marked by the oncoming of a swirling fringe of sea, that wetted the sand near Reginald's feet, and then retired noiselessly as though regretful for having intruded upon his solitude.

Yet he took but scant notice of moonlight reflection or gently-curling tide. "Only the heart," saith the Bible, "knoweth its own bitterness." No one passing by the spot where he was seated, and observing the quiet figure ruminating upon a stone, would have thought of connecting it with the elements out of which a five-act tragedy is made. Yet if the reflections of this solitary figure had found utterance in words, if the conflicting emotions of love and hate, and hope and despair, that tortured its soul had been rendered in Greek hexameters, the impression of a very true and overwhelming mental anguish, which constitutes, after

all, the underlying theme of all tragedy, would certainly have resulted from the experiment.

What, then, was the nature of Reginald's reflections? They were of so complex a kind that his condition might have been compared to that of a man who, undergoing various kinds of torture at the same moment, is unable to say which inflicts the acutest pain. That if Eila had loved him she could not have written as she did, could not have reasoned so coldly upon the hideous barter of her person; that under happier circumstances she might and could have loved him; that she was going to perdition, and that her letter was really an appeal to him to save her; that he was powerless to save her, and that she would not thank him for doing so, even were he able—all these conjectures, and a thousand others of a like description, presented themselves to his mind in a confused succession, and added each its fresh quota of torment. Worst of all was a degrading idea that came, he knew not whence, and that took possession for an instant of his troubled brain, though he could have loathed himself for having harboured it directly afterwards—the idea that, though he could not cease to love Eila, he would love her upon a lower level; that perhaps, after all, it was not himself, but his senses, that she had enchained, and that in that case she need not be lost to him irretrievably. She did not love her monstrous adorer. She was only terrified at the spectre of poverty and misery that he had invoked to coerce her. If she listened to him, it was not because he had won her heart, but simply because he had threatened the family with ruin. Supposing she were to accept the arrangement he tried to force upon her, would he not be treated according to his deserts if the first use she made of the liberty his money conferred should be to follow the inclination of her heart in another direction? To gain her for himself, Reginald felt that the shortest plan would be to thrust her into Hubert's arms. For, once she had been dragged down from her pedestal, the motive for worshipping her like a saint from a distance would exist no longer. From a purely material point of view there was everything to gain by the execution of the plan she had

divulged in her letter. As she had herself said, she had no social position to lose, no children with a future to consider. Whether she sent her cousin away and starved with her family in a garret, or whether she went to live with him, and placed them out of the reach of want, neither her lunatic husband nor his aged parents, living in an out-of-the-way corner of the world, would be affected by her decision. Moreover, old Mr. and Mrs. Frost had already marked her place among the goats assembled before the Judgment-seat at the Last Day, and under these circumstances the culprit might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.

Reginald, however, did not allow his idea to reach so advanced a stage as this. It had hardly suggested itself, like the whisper of an unseen Mephistopheles, before he had repelled it with horror.

Among the doubtful benefits which the gradual refining of our natures has conferred upon us may be reckoned the capacity for an enormous amount of suffering through those intangible appurtenances called the sentiments. If Reginald could have divested himself of these, his way would have been easy. But so far was he from being able to find comfort in the "lower level" theme of love, that I believe if a magician had appeared to him upon the Hobart beach at this moment, and had offered to convey young Mrs. Frost to a nunnery where she might have lived and died in chaste seclusion out of the reach of Reginald himself, as well as of all mortal men, he would have fallen at that magician's feet and blessed him. Yet what advantage could he hope to reap from such a solution, save that of being able to preserve his ideal intact in the exalted shrine he had fashioned for her? And it was the ideal herself that now besought him to couple her image with an act that would topple it down from its shrine like the idol in the temple of Dagon, and shatter it to pieces at his feet! At one moment he could have spurned Eila for her confidence in him, and the moment after he could have blessed her for it.

But I think it was the latter mood that prevailed, after all. Through all the elaborate arguments, the special pleading of which her letter was so full, the one clear truth was

evident to him. She confided in him and trusted him, not because she loved him, but because, as far as her heart could be moved, it had been moved by his love for her. She had been loyal to the promise she had made him, and in the closing part of her letter, "It is not good-bye unless you wish it to be so," he read between the lines that she hoped he might yet be able to save her at the eleventh hour. Unless, indeed, the cynical suggestion that had flitted through his mind had occurred to *her* as well as to him, and she meant him to understand that her alliance with her cousin would not put an insurmountable barrier between them as far as her own affections were concerned. But he repelled the thought with a "Retro, Satanas!" as it rose. If such a solution were monstrous in his eyes, it should be doubly monstrous in hers, and he would not sully his thought of her by dwelling upon it. The first interpretation he had given to her words was the only one worthy of her, and instead of sitting like a moon-struck fool all night upon the beach he should be up and doing in her behalf. If she were really in earnest, he could save her still. There is an unspeakable relief in presence of a soul-crushing disaster in the mere act of considering practical ways and means. Hope revives with the possibility of action. Reginald considered first what money he had to dispose of. Never had he found more reason to rejoice over his simple and economical habits of life than now, for with what he had saved, and with what he could borrow (and even at this crisis he would not borrow more than he could see his way to returning), he foresaw that he would be able to raise at least five hundred pounds. Now, five hundred pounds in ready money will accomplish a great deal under proper management. With five hundred pounds he could bring Eila and all her belongings to Tasmania again, and feed them and house them and look after them until some kind of position should have been found for them. To have them back would be an immense step gained. Here in this generous land there need be no fear of their starving. Their peculiarities would be all forgotten in their misfortunes. But how was he to let Eila know his plan? It would be more than five weeks be-



fore she could receive a letter from him, and what might not happen if the wolf were at the door of the Paris apartment, and a worse wolf in the shape of Hubert de Merle were lying in wait outside it while the five weeks were passing away?

He could telegraph, however. He could send a few short words of passionate appeal to Paris, adjuring Eila to wait. No doubt it is difficult to condense an impassioned appeal into words with the knowledge that each word costs half a guinea. But Reginald was not to be debarred by such considerations as these. He made his way the very next morning to the telegraph-office, and wired the despatch he had thought of in the night. The words for which he paid at the afore-mentioned rate were as follows: "Plenty money coming. Wait!" "Plenty money" was not unlike an aboriginal rendering of English, but it seemed to him to constitute the most powerful as well as the most practical form of appeal. He had thought in the first instance of giving expression to his passionate distress, of telling Eila that she was killing him. But by dint of repeating the words, "You are killing me," over to himself, they seemed to lose their force. Besides, though telegraph operators should be regarded as priests in a confessional, he could not hand this formula in cold blood to a clerk with whom he had played cricket only a few years before. It had also occurred to him that he would wire one word only—"Don't;" but this was discarded in its turn, as he remembered that it contained Mr. Punch's advice to young ladies about to marry.

How Reginald went through his work that day he could not have told. His figures were as correct as usual. He was even able to enter into technical questions of a kind that would have been a stumbling-block to any but a clear-headed adept, before a board of directors, the same afternoon. And all the time he was aware that an automatic double of himself was casting up the figures and arguing about the technicalities, and that his real self was twelve thousand miles away, in that garish apartment that Eila had described to him in her letters, kneeling at the feet of the woman he loved, and beseeching her for pity of herself and him to refrain from going to perdition.

When he left his office at the end of his day's work, though hardly at the end of the day itself, for the sun was still above the mountains, he turned his steps mechanically in the direction of the hilly street that led to Eila's old home. His memory travelled back to the evening when he had ascended it for the last time to take his final leave of her. If he could have foreseen what had come to pass now, would he have let her go away then? Would he have spoken to her as he had spoken, while they sat upon the bench in the moonlight side by side? Had he not almost opened the door to the catastrophe that threatened now? He had told her that nothing she might do would surprise him or detach him from her, and that even if she should listen to words of love from another man, she must not be afraid to avow the same to him. But he had never contemplated such a disaster as this. He had thought it possible that her impressionable nature might be touched by someone more gifted than himself, and had she written to him that she had truly lost her heart, he would have done his utmost to perform a brother's part towards her. Though in that case the position would have been tenfold worse than now. Reginald wandered on absorbed in his thoughts, heedless of the path he was following, until he had left the town behind him, and found himself in a narrow gorge between two hills. The rays of the sun fell slantwise upon the dark trees that towered above him in the solitude, turning the layers of foliage of the native cherry-tree into screens of verdant velvet, and warming the red-splashed gum-leaves into fiery splendour. Did Eila really mean what she had written about going away with him into the wilds, and earning the right to live by helping him to redeem the wilderness, or was this only one of the vague phrases in which she occasionally indulged, with the knowledge that she could not be taken at her word? What was the secret of the witchery she exercised over him? Apart from her love for her family, which was bound up with the strongest fibres of her being, he doubted whether she was capable of harbouring a strong or steadfast sentiment. Would not a woman who could feel deeply have been crushed to the earth by such experiences as she had

been through? Yet they had not brought her one gray hair, or set the shadow of a wrinkle on her face. How came it, then, that she had the power of inspiring such passionate devotion, of making all other women seem as puppets by her side? Was it her beauty? Was it magnetism? Had she inherited some secret charm from her mysterious ancestors in the East? He recalled her image in the washed-out cotton frock that clung so meagrely to her Hebe-like form, and shrank away from her wrists and ankles, and he thought for the thousandth time how beautiful and lovable she had looked in this guise, as she came down the garden path to wish him good-bye. She had spoken to him of Lucy Warden that last night; he would rather she had spoken less of Lucy and more of herself. The Wardens were in Europe now, but since Eila had spoken it had been hinted to him in other quarters that Miss Warden was still unmarried. Supposing, if all other expedients failed, he should travel to Europe and ask Lucy to marry him, with the sole end in view of saving Eila with her money? Which of two evils would be the worst—to see Eila cut off from him by her or by his undoing? For in either case she would be cut off from him. Only marriage with Lucy would make the separation final and irretrievable. Then, what right had he to sacrifice Lucy upon the altar of his flame for Eila? Though he had said Miss Warden was made of gutta-percha, she had proved that she possessed a heart, and it would be a sorry return for her constancy to break it in behalf of her rival.

If our power of obtaining a thing were in proportion to our power of wishing for it, we may be sure that as the sun went down that evening, and Reginald turned his back upon the solitary gorge and followed a cross-cut over the hills that led to the Sandy Bay cottage, Eila would have come to meet him in her shrunk cotton frock with outstretched arms, and together they would have turned their steps towards the wild hills, and there dwelt in an Eden composed of a bark hut of their own building. But though the wish may be father to the thought, it is not father to the accomplishment, and no living Eila, only a shadowy and tantalizing semblance of her walked by Reginald's side that night over the hills.

By half-past eight the normal condition of the little Sandy Bay cottage was one of dark abandonment. The helpless occupant would be in bed, and only a faint light shining through the drawn blind of a side-window would prove that her attendant was reading to her. Reginald had made it a rule that he should not be waited for. He was, therefore, not a little astonished to see an apparent illumination in the two front rooms as he opened the garden-gate. Hurrying up the path, he discerned the shadow of an unknown figure—clearly a man's—of large girth, seated in a chair at the table. His mother's condition had long debarred him from inviting friends of his own sex to drop in in the evening, for an hour of man's talk over whisky-and-water and cigars, and as he entered the room his transparent face wore the expression of uneasy expectancy which makes the unbidden caller feel so like an intruder. The man who corresponded to the shadow of large girth on the blind did not appear, however, to notice Reginald's expression. He rose from his chair and stood in the full light of the gas, while saying in plain-spoken, deliberate accents, with a strong suggestion of provincialism, "I shall have to introduce myself to you, sir, I expect. My name is Clare—William Clare. Maybe you've heard the family up on the hill speak of me—though I won't answer for it, notwithstanding that I'm their nearest relative on this side of the world."

"Pray be seated, Mr. Clare; I'm very glad to make your acquaintance. Of course I've heard your nephews and nieces speak of you many a time," Reginald said.

This was not a strict truth, for only once had Eila mentioned her uncle's existence to him. However, he shook the new-comer cordially by the hand. This delightful stranger had evidently come to speak about Eila, whose very kith and kin he was, and who had possibly dandled her on his knees in the days of her entrancing babyhood. Mr. Acton would fain have discovered some far-off suggestion of the niece in the face of the uncle; but Mr. Clare's features, of the broad, fleshy, clean-shaven, honest description, which might belong equally to Farmer John or to the first gentle-

man in the land, conveyed no hint of exotic lineage. A not unpleasant aroma of recently-smoked pipes clung about his person. His clothes were of country make, but good and new. Altogether a fresh-coloured, likeable, trust-inspiring, and to all appearance inwardly and outwardly clean individual was Mr. Clare.

"Pray sit down," said Reginald again. He drew forward a chair for himself and motioned his visitor to his former seat by the table. "You don't often come to town, I think, Mr. Clare? I never had the pleasure of meeting you at Cowa that I remember."

Mr. Clare did not answer immediately. Then :

"There were reasons why I kept away," he said shortly, and Reginald detected a motion of the left eyelid that might almost have been construed into a wink. "It's not my way to speak ill of people behind their backs, more than that my brother's children was as nice a family as you'd wish to see. But my sister-in-law was a peculiar woman, there's no gainsaying it. She had her notions, and it wasn't any use to run counter to them. One of 'em was to give a wide berth to uncles that sold half-chests of tea. Well, I've never been yet where I wasn't sure of a welcome, and that's why you didn't see me oftener at Cowa, if you want to know the truth. No ; never mind"—as Reginald made a gesture of polite deprecation—"I know what you're going to say. But I never cared a snap of the fingers for Mrs. Clare's opinion, good or bad. I liked the children ; I liked 'em for their father's sake, and their own as well. A fine girl, the eldest ! A pity they let her throw herself away like that ! But it's a long lane that has no turning, and it seems we've come to the end of it at last. And by-the-by, Mr. Acton, that's just the business I've come to speak to you about this evening. It seems you're such friends with my brother's family that you've got their address in Paris. But I want you to give it me now for a very particular reason. You see, I got word to-day that my niece's husband, Charles Frost, died quite sudden-like in the Norfolk Asylum this morning. . . . Why, whatever's up with you ? Your face has turned just as white as my shirt. I hope, sir, I haven't been indiscreet ? I wasn't

aware the young man was a friend of yours. Anyhow, it was a hopeless case; and what's a man without his reason? Better far for him, and all belonging to him, that he should be out of the world. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

The anxiously-inquiring expression portrayed in the honest eyes of Mr. William Clare would have struck Reginald as somewhat serio-comic, or comic-serious, at any other time; but now there was room for one thought, and for one only, in his mind. True, it was a thought that made his brain reel and his temples throb. Eila was free; she was free at last. Like the hero in Longfellow's "Dream," her burden had fallen from her; it had fallen into the sea. Hitherto she had been in the position of one of those criminals of legendary times who were chained for their lives to a corpse. She might wander where she would over the world. All she could do was to lengthen her chain a little. The ghastly thing at the other end was always there. Wherever she might go, she must feel its clogging weight—must be haunted by the certainty that it would drag her back in the end. But now it was gone, and she was free—free to listen at her will to a suitor's wooing; in a certain sense, she was to be had for the asking. Reginald went down upon his knees before her in imagination, and laid his love and his life at her feet. His first impulse was to telegraph the news instantly to Paris; but hardly had this idea occurred to him than it was rejected. Had she not hinted in her terrible epistle that Hubert would undoubtedly have proposed marriage to her had she been free, and that for her own part she would have jumped at his offer? Reginald never doubted that she would, indeed, in this respect have been as good, or as bad, as her word. With the fear before her eyes of seeing the family starve, no power on earth could have withheld her. Even the most impassioned letters, the most urgent appeals, might fail to move her at a distance. He believed her to have, among other womanly qualities, a quality which, though a womanly one, is none the less a defect. She was curiously accessible to the influence of personal persuasion. Though she might fill reams of paper with carefully considered ar-

guments, it was not to counter-arguments that she might be expected to yield most readily. A tender word, a heart-felt caress, had more effect than all the reasoning in the world. A wild desire to be by her side took possession of Reginald's soul. It was true that he had nothing to offer her but the shelter of a modest roof, and the prospect of being fairly well nourished and clothed. But had she not told him of her own accord that she would like to go into the wilds with him? He felt that he could have performed prodigies of work to place her in a setting worthy of her. . . . But the family—the poor, helpless, unpractical, visionary family! How should he provide for them? How dispose of them? It was all very well to say he would bring them to Tasmania. They must live when they got there, and slave as he would, to provide for five people (he would not even include Willie in the number) is a different matter to providing for one. The almost miraculous rapidity with which one impression will follow upon another when the brain is abnormally excited was the reason why the silence wherewith Reginald greeted Mr. William Clare's announcement lasted for so relatively short a time. In the course of a very few seconds, joy, hope, terror, despair, and, last of all, a great and supreme resolution, had held alternate sway over his mind. The resolution, however, had driven the other emotions away. Come what might, and though he should sacrifice his last penny in the effort, Reginald told himself that he would start that week for Europe. In five weeks he would clasp Eila in his arms, and if he let her escape from them again, why, all that could be said would be that he deserved his fate. But would he let her escape from them, once he held her? To those who knew Mr. Acton under his ordinary and demure aspect of a quiet, unemotional Hobart bachelor, his expression as this question surged up in his mind would have been a revelation. Mr. William Clare, who saw him for the first time, and who could not therefore establish a comparison between the man with his face working under the gaslight and the business-like, phlegmatic secretary who mechanically walked up and down Macquarrie Street to and from his office every day,

was only aware that, for some unknown reason, his new acquaintance was strangely and unduly agitated.

"Maybe you were a friend of that poor fellow's, sir," he ventured at last, moving uneasily in his seat. "If that's so, why, I must ask you to excuse me for being so abrupt."

"No—no; you weren't abrupt at all," Reginald said, mastering himself by a tremendous effort; "but I certainly never expected to hear of his going so suddenly. You see, it was a sacred charge I had undertaken (I undertook it at Eila's—at Mrs. Frost's—request), to see her—her husband every week. He was in his usual condition last Friday. There was no reason for supposing then that he would not live to be a hundred——"

"'Twas a stroke," interposed Mr. Clare in relieved tones. "I had to come down to town on business this morning, and I timed myself to catch the train from New Norfolk. The first man I met in the compartment as I got in was a chap who's got a brother in the asylum. Drink, of course. 'You've got a nephew—or, rather, you *had* a nephew—in there, too, Mr. Clare,' says he, looking at me solemn-like. 'A nephew by marriage,' I said; 'and a damned bad job for everybody concerned.' 'Well, you're quit of him now,' he says, 'for I've just come away from seeing his dead body.' 'What do you mean?' I asked him. I was kind of dazed by the news, and didn't rightly know for a minute whether I was glad or sorry. 'He had a stroke,' he says. 'It was on the brain, so I was told. And, upon my word, it's a happy release.' 'Upon my word, I believe it is,' I said. And I got out my traps and left the train there and then. I went up to the asylum and got the news confirmed. I had a sight of the body, too. It looked just as calm and rational as if the poor fellow had died in full possession of his senses. They telegraphed the news to his old father and mother here in Hobart; but, from what I've heard of them, they ain't the people to wire it on to his wife; and, anyhow, if they do, they won't break the news very gently. I guessed you were the right person to come to; and I wasn't mistaken, since it appears you were delegated by my niece to keep a kind of watch over her husband. Now, sir, will



you take it upon yourself to tell her the news? Tell her, too, that she knows I'm no hand at letter-writing—if it isn't a business letter; but if she wants a home, or assistance of any kind, why, she's only got to write to me, and, whatever her mother may say, she'll find blood's thicker than water in the end. I'm not of opinion that it would be advisable to wire the news. It's a heavy expense, and there's nothing to be gained, if it isn't giving a body an extra start. Still, if you think it's our duty to do it, you'll please draw on me for what's necessary. And that reminds me again, Mr. Acton. It's a delicate matter to speak about, and I don't rightly know how the widow and children were provided for by my brother, but I calculate they're pretty hard up, if they're not too proud to confess it; and wouldn't you advise me to just send 'em a hundred pounds or so to help them along, without waiting to be asked?"

"Indeed, I think it's an excellent idea, Mr. Clare," Reginald said earnestly.

He scanned the face of Eila's uncle closely as he uttered these words, and what he saw there prompted him all upon a sudden, and without premeditation, to speak as he had never thought to speak to a living soul of his relations with the family on the hill. He did not say, or even hint, that his heart was hopelessly and irretrievably bound up in one of their number, and that this was the real true reason why he pleaded for them now as though he had been their brother. But he spoke, nevertheless, as one who speaks of the thing that lies nearest to his heart. He described their home-life as he had known it at Cowa: their strong affection for each other, their quixotic ideas, their illusions, their terrible lack of any practical comprehension of the realities of existence. He showed how Fate as well as their own natures had worked against them in depriving them of what constituted their only means of existence. He declared that the failure of the insurance company in which Mr. Clare had insured his life had left them actually penniless; and in answer to a sympathizing request for advice as to how best to help them in this pass, he answered that to assist the family back to Tasmania, and reinstate them at

Cowa, would be the best and surest means of saving them from starvation—or worse. But the worst he kept to himself, deeming the “starvation” a sufficient plea in itself. He did not tell Eila’s uncle of the existence of the silver-killing cousin, whose help had been offered at a price which it made him shudder to contemplate; nor did he say that he had himself sent the wherewithal to stave off the first inroad of want. That he had said enough, however, to gain his friends the help they needed so sorely was evident from the reassuring manner in which Mr. William Clare received his account of their troubles. The latter, it is true, was a man of business, and men of business do not, as a rule, sympathize with the misfortunes that unpractical dreamers bring upon themselves. But if his manner was that of a business man, his expression was that of Eila’s uncle, and it was owing to this circumstance that Reginald found the courage to speak.

Before Mr. William Clare took his departure that night, the liking of two honestly-intentioned men for each other had sprung up between himself and his host. The Sandy Bay cottage showed its illumined blind until long after midnight, and it was Reginald himself who placed on the table the whisky-and-water over which the pipe of counsel was smoked. After his visitor had gone and a hearty shake of the hands had been exchanged with him at the little garden-gate under the rays of the descending moon, Reginald returned to the cottage to ponder over all that had been said and accomplished that night. He had been through emotions enough in the last twenty-four hours to turn his hair white like that of the hero of Byron’s poem. And now the great, the crowning emotion of all had come. Eila, his love, was free. No maniac form, armed with a husband’s rights, need mingle itself henceforth with his dreams of her. She was free—free in mind and in body. But stay! Had she not spoken to him of an accursed chain that threatened to fetter her in yet another direction? Well, from this danger he trusted to be in time to deliver her. His talk with her uncle had raised his hopes and his spirits. He recapitulated to himself the essential points that had

been discussed that evening, and the resolutions arrived at. First of all, it had been arranged that he himself should be responsible for carrying the news of her bereavement (for such was the conventional word that had been employed) to young Mrs. Frost. Uncle William had appeared to look upon the curious fact that Mr. Acton was on the point of starting himself for Europe as a mere happy coincidence and nothing else. If he thought more than this, he disguised it successfully, like the non-loquacious parrot of the proverb. It had also been arranged that Reginald should be the bearer of a hundred pounds to the family on Uncle William's account, with the offer of assistance towards re-embarking them for Tasmania. Likewise the announcement that Mr. William Clare was prepared to help Willie towards a selection, and to find a place for Dick in his store. And at this proposal it had been Reginald's turn to think thoughts he refrained from divulging. Another point arranged between the friendly conspirators, was that Reginald should inform Eila's parents-in-law of the plans that had been made in the family's behalf, and likewise sound them as to their intentions with regard to their son's widow. All this appeared to Reginald to constitute a good night's work when he came to think it over. Of the part of the programme that Uncle William knew nothing about, or professed to know nothing about, Reginald, we may be sure, thought the most of all. He had not closed his eyes the night before, but his wakefulness to-night was appalling. The intensity of his apprehension of the situation was so keen that he felt as though he were all one throbbing sentient brain. Instead of mocking rest by going to bed, he went to his room for his towels, turned out the gas and stole softly, in order not to disturb his mother, through the back-garden down to the strip of beach. The moon had quite disappeared. Only the ashy light that precedes the dawn made the sea dimly visible. The tide was high, and the waves looked cold and gray. He threw off his clothes and, running like the primitive man into the advancing sea, swam far out upon its swaying surface—almost too far, indeed, for the flood of thoughts and fears that

overwhelmed him made him unmindful of the distance. He took his strokes mechanically, pricked on by the cold and a certain inward fever of excitement. It was only when he saw how near the crimson band that scored the sky over the opposite shore looked to his eyes, and when a feeling of physical lassitude began to creep upon him, that he understood the danger of what he had done. Could there be folly more monstrous than to go to his death when Eila was waiting for him at the other end of the world? The thought seemed to paralyze him at first, and then to give him a desperate strength. He turned with the skill of a practised swimmer upon his back, and slowly, and with infinite care, paddled himself gently along in the direction of the beach. The incoming tide helped his efforts, and, staring up at the sky with eyes that smarted from the washing of the sea over them, he saw the stars pale gradually in the lightening sky. Arrived within two or three hundred yards of shallow water, he struck out again with renewed vigour, but was obliged to confess to himself that it was touch-and-go with him more than once before his feet finally found the bottom.

The anger he felt against himself as he threw himself down, utterly exhausted, upon the beach, and realized how near he had been to his death, was more on Eila's account than on his own. But the physical fatigue had had the effect of a strong narcotic. He never remembered clearly how he had dried himself, or put on his clothes, or made his way back to the cottage. But that he must have done these things mechanically was certain, for when he next regained consciousness it was eleven in the morning, and he was in his own bed in his own room. A profound and blessed sleep had obliterated all sense of being in him during the intervening hours. He admired the certainty of his mother's instinct, that, instead of causing him to be waked in time to go to his office, had actually sent the servant with a message to the effect that he was detained at the house by illness. He felt like a giant refreshed by wine as he rose and dressed himself, his mind full of all the things he had undertaken to do. There was leave of absence to obtain, in the first instance. He was entitled to a two-months' holi-

day, having purposely postponed taking his month when his turn had come in the course of the last half-year. He must make interest with the board of directors to obtain a six-months' leave upon "urgent private affairs." To prepare his mother for the separation would be worse than to confront all the directors of all the companies in Australia. Then he must, in popular parlance, "raise the wind," and contrive to have at least five hundred pounds in cash within two days' time. He must be ready himself in three days to catch the Launceston boat, which was bound to deliver passengers and letters in Melbourne in time for the outgoing mail-steamer. But he must not neglect to see old Mr. and Mrs. Frost in the interval, and to use his best and most diplomatic endeavours in behalf of young Mrs. Frost. Diplomacy, indeed, would be needed, for he would certainly be asked by what right he had constituted himself guardian of the interests of the family on the hill. To this, however, he had his answer ready, the answer being nothing but the truth, pure and simple. It was a curious circumstance that, had there been anything to conceal (though none but he and the woman he loved should have been in the secret), that answer could not have been uttered by him. Now he could look old Mr. Frost straight in the face—and he meant to do so—could meet his inquisitorial eyes unflinchingly, could say to him in so many words: "Why do I take upon myself to speak to you of your responsibilities? Well, if your daughter-in-law had been free, she would have been the one woman in the world I would have desired to make my wife. She is free now, and I intend to try to win her heart. That is the reason why I interest myself in her family as well as in herself."

Even judged by the old man's own narrow and Calvinistic creed, such an avowal could not be an offence either to God or to man. So much for the tasks that Reginald had to perform before he took his departure. As to the course he would follow when he reached his destination, there would be time and to spare to think of that during the long journey across the Indian Ocean, the vacant days of panting idleness in the Red Sea, the slow steaming along the

Mediterranean towards Marseilles (slow it must be in any case, judged by *his* sensations). No earthly plea, no reasonable excuse, save his great and overmastering love, could he urge when he should appear before Eila. He would tell her he had come to save her. If she went to Hubert, it could only be by treading upon his own dead body stretched at her feet. He would not live to see the work of desecration accomplished. True, he had no money. He would be obliged to admit that the thing he had done was wild, unreasonable, unpardonable, from a common-sense point of view. But love is beyond common-sense. With what he had and what had been confided to him, he was bringing at least a sufficient sum of money to convey the family back to Tasmania, and once there, he and his new ally would not let them come to grief. Looked at in this light the enterprise was not, perhaps, so wild as it appeared at first sight.

Though promising himself that he would not think of the real object for which he had undertaken the voyage until he was fairly started, Reginald did in point of fact think of little else during the few agitated days that preceded his departure. We may take it for granted that he carried out the programme he had laid down to the letter; that he scraped together five hundred pounds in cash, whereof almost a hundred went immediately for the purchase of a return ticket by the Messageries steamer to Marseilles; that he broke the news of his projected flight to his mother without breaking her heart at one and the same time; that he conducted himself with the skill of a born tactician in his interview with old Mr. and Mrs. Frost, whom he found more incensed than ever against their daughter-in-law, anger being a derivative from grief; that he obtained the necessary leave from his directors without forfeiting his position; that he packed the things into his portmanteau with a true sailor's adroitness, and that all the time he was carrying on these multifarious operations his spirit was leaping on before him to the garish apartment in the unknown regions of the Boulevard de l'Observatoire inhabited by young Mrs. Frost. To discover what the latter

was doing meanwhile will oblige us to return to Paris, and to take up our narrative from the time when Hubert quitted her, with the menace made at the last moment, giving her only three months in which to make up her mind to accept or reject the plan he had proposed to her.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### WHAT EILA WAS DOING MEANWHILE.

THREE months' respite! Twelve weeks, nay, fourteen, well counted—in which to lay her plans and find a door of escape! This was the thought that was paramount in our heroine's mind, as, pale and weary, she toiled up the polished steps that led to the *quatrième* after her interview with Hubert was over. He was gone. Adieu henceforth to the diners at the restaurant, the drives to the theatre in the closed landau, the intoxicating taste of the splendours of the brilliant Paris of the rich. Back to her ashes must Cinderella return. Her fairy-coach was once more a common pumpkin, her gorgeously-caparisoned chargers eight mean rats, and her own bejewelled train a blue kitchen apron. True, by means of two little words she might transform herself into a princess again, and drive in a carriage and eight once more; but it was just these two words she could not bring herself to pronounce. Whether, by dint of rehearsing them in her thoughts by day and her dreams by night, she would find the strength to utter them by the time the three months were at an end, Eila dared not ask herself. It would depend upon so many things. If the wolf, for instance, should show his fangs at the door of the *quatrième*, she could not answer for what she might be driven to do. For the time being, at least, she had the wherewithal to throw him sops in plenty. But supposing a malignant Fate should deprive Hubert of life and fortune before the period of probation was over! The very thought of such a catastrophe made Eila shake and shiver. Before she had reached the

door of the apartment she felt strongly tempted to run down the staircase again, hail a cab, drive to the Louvre, and fling herself into her cousin's arms. There should be no more half-measures. She would take her place by his side in the full light of day, call herself boldly Madame de Merle, and spend the rest of her life in making him devote his great fortune to worthy purposes—first, and above all, to securing the prospects of the family.

How many diverse points of view succeeded each other in her mind as she mounted the steps can never be told. If she could have felt towards Hubert as she felt towards Reginald, she would not have hesitated for a moment. But then where would have been the virtue—where the self-sacrifice? On the other hand, if Hubert had shown himself capable of behaving as Reginald had done, might he not really have succeeded in inspiring her with something more than mere cousinly gratitude and affection? She had no shrinking from his person. Deformed, distorted, Vulcan-like as he might be, there was nothing that repelled her in his ugliness. Had she not told him she would have married him had she been free? "Then how doubly illogical and unreasonable I am," she reflected, perplexed by the apparent inconsistency of her scruples. "What do I want, after all? Since I would marry Hubert if I were free, and since I attach no particular value to the institution of marriage, what is the obstacle to my living with him at once, as he wishes, and making everything right for the family? It is Reginald who prevents me, and nothing but Reginald. Whatever I may come to in the end, I cannot act without warning him. Perhaps I shall do just the contrary to what he advises. But at least he cannot say that I have not kept my promise."

The short February day had merged into darkness as Eila entered the ante-chamber, where Mamy's bright head, bending over the table under the light of the kerosene lamp, was the first object her eyes encountered. To be the bearer of bad tidings to the family was the heaviest burden that could be laid on young Mrs. Frost's shoulders. She instantly cast about for a formula by which to soften the un-



welcome announcement that Hubert had suddenly been called away—"pour affaires," she repeated to herself, using unconsciously the French form she had heard employed in this connection—and that the coveted Continental tour must be put off for a whole three months, during which it would behove the family to live very sparingly. But Mamy lifted two eyes that reflected almost as much brightness as her auburn crown to her sister, while the latter dropped with a fatigued air into the nearest chair.

"You don't ask me where I've been," cried Mamy, with some elation in her voice. "To the Hôtel du Louvre. And who with? Why, with the Mr. Wilton we saw in the courtyard last night. He came to call this afternoon and we found him trying to explain who he was looking for to the concierge below, for he had forgotten our names. The man and his wife—you know how greedily curious they are—were pretending not to understand him, just to find out all they could about him. He brought us the solemn promise we should see Dick to-morrow. Hubert had told him so. Dick has committed some escapade—nothing more"—a certain triumph was observable in Mamy's manner at this point, for was she not the first to whom the secret had been confided?—"nothing that matters, you know; but it had to be settled (or the consequences had to be settled) before he could come home. And Mr. Wilton was so awfully kind about it, Eila, you can't think. He insisted on making us drive back to the hotel with him in a closed fiacre—and a very good one it was, too, for a wonder; and he made it wait for us the whole time we were there, and he simply *wouldn't* let us go away until he had given us afternoon tea in the Louvre dining-room—that wonderful place, you know, where I dined with the Wardens, only it doesn't look quite so wonderful now. And what do you think? He remembers seeing *me* there! It was the evening of my day at Robinson's, when you stayed out so late after you had been to give a lesson in the Rue de la Paix—you remember?"

Assuredly Eila remembered. Yes, it was certainly a coincidence, but there were yet stranger coincidences than this, of which Mamy must know nothing.

"He asked about you, too—a little curiously, I thought," continued Mamy; "not *too* curiously, though. He had been so surprised to hear you were married. He thought you were quite a young girl."

Remembering under what circumstances Mr. Wilton had probably made his first estimate of her age, Eila maintained a troubled silence, and Mamy rattled on:

"I said it was a pity you were not. I could not help telling him a little about the reason why you came to be here without your husband, Eila—or else he would think it so strange. And he does so want to be allowed to come in and out like Hubert while he is in Paris. It is the first time of his being here, and you know how dull it is going about by one's self. But the best of all is that mother has actually promised to give him some French lessons. You never saw anyone so eager about learning. He wanted to begin to-night, straight off. But mother won't do anything till she has looked up the books. You may think how proud she is at producing the old dog's-eared school-books, and proving they have actually come in useful again. But, anyhow, she wouldn't begin until Dick comes back. Still, Mr. Wilton is coming to-morrow to see if she is ready for him. Fancy mother with a pupil! Won't it be fun!"

"Truca will be having one next," said Eila, with a faint smile, but it was obviously for the sake of saying something. "We'd better set up a school, I think. Mamy dear, would you be very much disappointed if our trip were put off until the summer?"

"Disappointed!" Astonished indignation almost deprived Mamy of utterance. "Disappointed is no word for it! Who talks of putting it off, I should like to know?"

"I was afraid you would mind," said Eila apologetically; "but something has happened that nobody could foresee. Hubert is called away suddenly on—on—business, for three months. That is not a long time to wait, after all; and travelling will be so much pleasanter in the warm weather. You must help me to reconcile mother and Truca to it."

"But I can't reconcile *myself*," cried Mamy, in doleful accents. "Oh dear! oh dear! it was too much happiness. I

felt this morning it couldn't last—something would have to go snap."

"But nothing has gone snap. We've only got to wait a little for the treat. We shall have the pleasure of looking forward. Don't you remember, Mamy, when you were quite a little girl you used to say things were so much nicer if one waited for them."

"Oh yes, if one waited to eat the strawberries and cream at the top of the hill instead of the bottom. I did not mean waiting half a lifetime. One may wait until all the zest is gone at that rate."

Eila did not continue the discussion. She had taken off her thick boa—a present from Hubert—and was smoothing it absently across her knees. Seeing Mamy's face working as a preliminary to shedding a few relieving tears of mortification, she said quickly:

"Oh, don't cry, Mamy dear! I never dreamt you would have minded it so much. Perhaps it can be arranged still."

"Our b-boxes—all p-packed!" whimpered Mamy. "How can one ever settle d-down to anything again?"

"Mamy," said her sister suddenly, "if by marrying Sydney you could set out at once on the journey—not only you, but all of us together—just as it was arranged, with the courier and all, would you make the sacrifice?"

Mamy dried her eyes before she answered decidedly:

"No; having to take Sydney along would spoil it all. He'd be so dreadfully in the way—as a husband, I mean. I should like him to come well enough in any other capacity."

"Supposing we invited him to come with us?" said Eila. "I'm sure he'd ask no better——"

"I'm sure he wouldn't, either," agreed Mamy; "but he would tease me, as he always does when we are together." Then, after a short silence: "I had a letter from him to-day from Nice."

"A letter from Sydney! Oh, tell me what he says."

"I haven't read it all," pulling a crumpled document from her pocket. "What a school-boy hand he does write, to be sure! Shall I read it to you?"

"Do!" eagerly.

"‘My dear Mamy, I——’ Oh, the rest doesn’t matter."

"It does—it does matter," protested her sister; "it’s just what I want to hear."

"Then I’ll give it you to read for yourself. But wait till I look at the rest of it. He says he could almost fancy himself back in Australia, because of the gums and wattles."

"Nothing more?"

"That his mother has found out ‘it’s the thing’ to go to the gambling-tables, and since she won forty francs one evening she can’t be kept away from them."

"Is that all?"

"Oh, read it yourself!" said Mamy impatiently, flinging the letter across the table to her sister.

Sydney Warden was not more eloquent with his pen than with his tongue; but words spoken straight from the heart move us more than the most elaborately-concocted phrases.

The letter furnished a list of the names of various fashionable young ladies upon whom Sydney’s mother had cast an eye for her son. "But there isn’t any of them a patch on you," he declared; "and if my mother showed me the greatest beauty in creation I wouldn’t look twice at her. When a fellow cares for anyone as I do for you, he hasn’t eyes for other girls."

Eila’s only comment upon the epistle was a significant sigh as she handed it back to the owner. The same evening she informed the family, in the persons of her mother and Truca, of the proposed delay in their long-expected Continental trip. Mrs. Clare’s first comment upon the news was an outburst of righteous wrath against her cousin.

"And he is gone, you say? No chance of speaking to him? But I will write and tell him what I think. All these moves and counter-moves are mere pretexts for deferring to execute the just exchange I proposed. I have a good mind to send the picture after him. We have the packing-case—or did you burn it, Eila, in the winter? I hope not. He will know what it means when he sees it. I won’t have my girls kept out of their inheritance any longer."

"If it is the ruby you mean, mother," said Eila wearily,

"we have no legal claim to it, and we owe Hubert enough by this time to buy a hundred rubies."

"*There* you are wrong," cried Mrs. Clare with the calmness of a certainty that nothing could alter or swerve; "that ruby was a stone that could not be valued. It was beyond value. I believe myself it was like the Koh-i-Nûr, and if we have no legal claim—a point about which I am not at all sure—we have a moral claim, and that is worth all the legal claims in the world."

Truca looked in dismay from her mother to her elder sister while this discussion was going on. As Eila made no reply, but stared drearily in front of her, the child went and took her stand by her sister's side with an arm clasped round her neck. Eila felt for the small hand that was fondling her neck, and held it tightly in her own as Mrs. Clare continued, "When I am dead and gone you will discover the truth of what I say. Why my children spend their lives in thwarting my plans for them, Heaven only knows. Did I not bring you home on purpose to discover Hubert? And how long had we been here before we found him? Has not every word I told you proved to be the exact truth? But if I was so anxious to find your cousin, it certainly was not for his company alone—though he has been very kind and cousinly; I am the first to admit it; still, I could not know before we met him *what* he might turn out to be—my real object in coming was to obtain the restitution of the family heirloom, of which my mother was defrauded—which belongs of right to me first, and to my daughters after me—and through the possession of which Hubert de Merle is now in the position of a millionaire."

"But, mother, a ruby does not give interest! He cannot have the jewel and the revenue too," expostulated Mamy, while Eila continued to gaze gloomily in front of her.

"You reason like a child," said her mother impatiently. "The possession of a jewel of that value is a fortune in itself. Perhaps it is hired out to some potentate. I have heard of people hiring diamonds for court balls. Money may always be raised upon jewellery. How else could people pawn their jewels—a thing which is done every day?"

That, if Hubert's address had been forthcoming at this moment, Mrs. Clare would instantly have carried out her threat her daughters did not doubt for an instant. Eila, however, declared that she had no means of making it known until Hubert wrote, and Mamy adroitly diverted her mother's thoughts into another channel by asking when the self-constituted pupil was to have his first lesson.

The answer was given by the pupil himself the following day. Jack had taken the best means of ensuring a cordial welcome by bringing the runaway Dick with him. Perhaps it was not to be regretted that the first effusions called forth by the prodigal's return were held in check by the presence of a stranger, for in the face of Dick's drawn countenance and solemn eyes, and in the relief from the tension they had endured, it is more than probable that mother and sisters would have cried over him as a victim and a martyr. Dick in his turn would have been tempted to make plenary confession, and the first result would have been a procession of the family to the refuge of the penitent Adèle, with an enthusiastic offer of the shelter and protection of the apartment of the *quatrième*. Dick would have sworn to assist in the work of regeneration, and would have actually believed in his own power of keeping his oath. Stranger still, Mrs. Clare and her daughters would guilelessly and uncomprehendingly have subscribed thereto in their turn; and as for the consequences, none could have foreseen them. Mr. Wilton's presence, however, prevented this inevitable sequel from taking place, and before the procession to Mademoiselle Adèle's apartment could be organized, that young person had taken herself and Hubert's five hundred francs to pastures new. She disappears henceforth from these pages. Subsequent to her disappearance, Dick went through a phase of savage cynicism and misanthropy. But this is a forestalling of history. For the present it is enough to know that he is safely restored to the bosom of his family.

As for Mr. Wilton, it was edifying to witness the zeal which animated him for the acquisition of the French language under the guidance of the blue-eyed seraph's mother.

"Nothing on earth," he vehemently assured the assembled family, "had ever interested him so much as the French grammar. Hubert isn't best pleased at my giving him the slip, I tell you," he added confidentially, "but I wasn't going to throw away a chance like that to please him."

From the box of Cowa books that still encumbered Dick's bedroom, Mrs. Clare had triumphantly disinterred a torn volume of Ollendorf's complete method, and a venerable copy of Hamel's exercises. It would have been as much as Jack's place, as pupil, was worth to suggest that he should provide himself with more recent and cleaner publications. In her first enthusiasm for her self-chosen task, Mrs. Clare would suffer none but herself to approach Jack with a grammar or exercise-book, and the young man found his deep-laid schemes scattered to the winds, and himself rendered very uncomfortable, one afternoon when Mamy was actually requested to leave the room because she laughed in concert with him at his unsuccessful efforts to pronounce a French *u*. One of the strongest symptoms of a sincere passion is the desire to prove one's self worthy in the eyes of the beloved object, but there were days when Jack could have cursed his fate for providing him with no more congenial field for his exploits than the French irregular verbs. Mrs. Clare, moreover, was quite oblivious of the proverb that it is not fair to overwork the willing horse. Accustomed to measure the capacities of others by those of her own quick-witted though worldly-*unwise* offspring, she set her defenceless pupil tasks of appalling length to get by heart.

"If it were anything but French now!" Jack said helplessly one day, after floundering in the vain attempt to conjugate the verb *bouillir*. But Mrs. Clare was inflexible. The not unlikely hypothesis that the young man had some other end in view, in the unfailing regularity with which he came, than that of merely learning to assert that he "boiled" in the subjunctive mood, never suggested itself to her mind. How Jack might regard her daughters did not concern her at present. Before and above all he was her pupil, and Mrs. Clare's first aim in amateur teaching was to make her pupils understand that she was not to be trifled with. Still, to pay

vicarious court to the object of his adoration through the conjugating of the verb *aimer* was a pastime Mr. Wilton had no intention of continuing indefinitely. Never since the days when he had maintained his place as bottom boy in the French class at the Sydney Grammar School had his mental powers been so severely taxed. Had it not been for those delicious intervals during which Eila made the tea, and Mamy served it, and Jack could rest his tongue by talking his own language in the form of Australian slang, he told himself he could never have endured the strain. But there were episodes that took away all the sting from his task, as, for instance, when Mamy dropped an extra lump of sugar (she had noticed he liked his tea sweet) into his cup with her own fingers over his shoulder as she went by. Jack had to hold himself with the strength of four, as the French say, not to stoop and kiss them. He hoped it was not vanity that made him think Mamy returned his liking a little, but he could not help noticing that whenever his eyes rested upon her (and somehow they were *always* turning in her direction), he was sure to meet with an answering look in a second's time. He was secretly filled with gratitude to Hubert for taking himself off, as it gave him an opportunity of inviting the family in Hubert's place. He found to his great joy that they rarely refused to be "treated." Thus, he took seats for them all at the Opéra, at the Français, at the Vaudeville, at the Opéra Comique, in the same week, and insisted upon their coming to a sumptuous supper with him afterwards. The family prestige, which had suffered severely in the concierge's estimation from Hubert's disappearance, began to mount higher than ever. Jack bestowed royal tips upon the evil-looking pair for no better reason than the one conveyed in the words of the waltz-song, "Oh, be glad, my heart! Hilda"—or whoever takes Hilda's "place"—"smiled to-day."

To be sure, Jack could not be credited with the possession of a ruby, and Eila had some misgivings lest he should be spending his money too freely. Mrs. Clare was convinced that his largesses were a delicate token of his appreciation of his French lessons, and set him longer tasks than ever.



Jack was beginning to dream of the irregular verbs, and was convinced that his severe studies were undermining his health. It was time to bring things to a climax, but how? Kind fate in the shape of a fortunate accident sent him the longed-for opportunity.

It was getting on towards April. The Luxembourg Gardens had broken out into myriads of tiny crumpled leaves of shimmering green, over which the family went into ecstasies regularly every morning when the sun shone. Eila was biding her time. Spring clothes were sadly needed, but she dared not spend the money necessary to procure them. On the other hand, she had abstained from communicating with Hubert since his departure, six weeks previously. An occasional terror of the consequences, should he disappear altogether, weighed upon her at times; but the very day her letter to Reginald should have reached Tasmania, a telegram from the latter was handed to her containing the words, "Plenty money coming. Wait." Now she could breathe freely. Whence the money was to be procured she did not stop to inquire. Perhaps Reginald had been fortunate in the mines (though it was not like him to speculate), or perhaps he had come in for a legacy. In any case his assurance took away all shadow of an excuse for recalling Hubert for the present. Eila even ventured to invest in some light-hued material at the Bon Marché to make afternoon and theatre-going frocks for the family. And not only was the money for Dick's attendance at the studio regularly forthcoming, but her constant effort was to keep intact the twenty pounds she had laid aside out of her own share of the two hundred wherewith to refund the money abstracted by him from Hubert. Deep would have been her mortification had she known that she was only restoring to her cousin what was his own, for Eila still believed that the five thousand francs she had received from the director of the theatre had been legitimately awarded her as the price of the exhibition of her charms upon the stage of the Folies-Fantassin.

But to return to Jack. The accident that favoured his suit was the unlooked-for absence of his taskmistress one

afternoon when he presented himself as usual at the Boulevard de l'Observatoire with his French exercises in the pocket of his great-coat. Never did schoolboy, with a caning in prospect, rejoice more heartily over the providential disappearance of his tyrant. To add to his delight, it was Mamy who, after opening the door to him, mischievously proposed to give him his French lesson in lieu of her mother. Whether by accident or design, young Mrs. Frost did not appear. Her voice in conversation with her little sister, and the snip of her scissors, were plainly heard in the adjoining room. Meanwhile Jack found himself alone for the first time in his life with the object of his adoration. His mind was made up. He had only been waiting for an opportunity to declare himself. Upon every occasion of his seeing the blue-eyed seraph after her first apparition at the Louvre dinner-table, his impression of her had grown stronger and stronger. He thanked Heaven that he was a rich man—rich enough to place the seraph in a golden frame, and to set up the family properly. A year or two ago the most he could have offered her would have been a boundary rider's hut on a station. But times were changed since then. He had an inexhaustible bank now in the bowels of the earth. Even his own family, whom he had also "set up" in the first instance, did not know quite how rich he was. And excepting in the matter of horses he had no expensive tastes. He could not understand why people should spend so much upon old pictures and china when new were to be had at a quarter the price. Nor had he ever felt tempted to deck the triumphal car of some queen of the demi-monde with golden trophies. A wife after his own heart was the object of his worthier ambition, and if he indulged in any airy castle-building upon the strength of his silver-mine, it took no more extravagant form than that of a dwelling in the Bush of princely dimensions, with a tower a hundred feet high, and stables and loose-boxes fashioned after the latest and most approved models.

Finding himself alone with Mamy this afternoon, Jack feigned to take her proposal to play the part of professor seriously. He seated himself at the table by her side, stroked

his blonde moustache with a good-boy air, and produced his exercises with becoming gravity. Mamy performed her own *rôle* in the comedy with equal decorum, but her eyes were dancing and the corners of her lips were twitching. She did not see the mistakes in the laboured composition upon which her eyes rested. She did not even gather the meaning of the words she was looking at in Jack's handwriting. Though her face was bent over the paper, she felt, without seeing, that the young man was devouring her with his eyes. A delicious confusion was the clearest sensation Mamy was conscious of. Her hand, that lay palm down upon the paper outspread on the table, was trembling. All of a sudden she was aware that Jack had stooped down and kissed it.

Mamy's face and neck became in an instant one great burning blush.

"Why do you do that?" she whispered, raising two half-frightened, half-acquiescing eyes to his face.

"Because I love you," said Jack boldly; "I love you, and want you to marry me. If I took a month telling you, it would come to the same thing in the end. And you don't dislike me altogether, do you, Mamy?—I always call you Mamy to myself. You've no idea how much I care for you, I tell you. If you'll only say you'll have me, I'll be the happiest chap in creation."

He had not only kissed her hands again, but had taken them in his own, and as he pleaded his cause with her, his face was very close to hers. As Mamy looked shyly into it while she listened to his words, a great trust in him grew up in her mind. To be sure, Sydney Warden had been just as much in earnest when he had asked her the same question in almost the same way, but Sydney's eyes did not possess the same magnetic quality as Jack's. They awakened no corresponding message in her own, the outcome of sensations too deep and subtle for words. Mamy wished at this moment that no one in the world had ever spoken of love to her before or had kissed her hands, save Jack. The expression of her face was so complete and artless a transcript of her mood that the young man, still holding her hands, bent forward instinctively and pressed his lips to hers.

"My own Mamy—my own little girl—you are going to say 'Yes.'"

Whether she ever really said it is still a matter of doubt. In after days Mamy declared that this "Yes" had never been uttered, nor her consent formally given. That Jack should have taken it informally was perhaps the more excusable that she had hidden her face against his shoulder after he kissed her, and in that position it was easier to take a *yes* for granted than to wait until it was audibly pronounced.

A proposal of marriage is for the most part the culmination of the pleasant process variously described under the headings of *courting, billing and cooing, flirting*, or, more vulgarly, *spooning*. This order was reversed in Mamy's case. The proposal having come first, it was wonderful how matters were facilitated for the carrying out of the earlier portions of the programme afterwards. It was more interesting to Mamy, however, than it would probably prove to the readers of her biography to hear Jack retrace the origin and progress of his passion. If he had studied the Platonic theory, he would have declared that he had recognised his other half from the first instant of beholding her fair sunburnt face at *table d'hôte*. Mamy, too, might have avowed that Jack's glance had been responsible for the unaccountable mood of seriousness which overcame her as she descended the Louvre staircase by Sydney Warden's side after their laughing-match at the dinner-table. But these were confessions that were to come later. At present it was joy enough to discover that they had liked each other (this was Mamy's way of expressing it, though Jack used a stronger term to depict his own feelings) from the beginning.

"You must let me tell your sister—now," the young man urged after these avowals had been satisfactorily commented upon.

"Oh, I'm afraid she'll be angry," said Mamy anxiously.

It had never occurred to her to wonder whether Jack had the means of keeping a wife; and of course that, and the paramount consideration of whether he was in a position

to help the family, were the first things the worldly-minded Eila would think of.

"Why? She doesn't want you to be an old maid," he laughed. "She looks awfully nice—quite worthy to be your sister, in fact; and that's the highest compliment I could pay her."

"Yes. But her own marriage has been so unhappy," murmured Mamy. Then, vexed with herself for prevaricating in intention, if not in words, she added hurriedly: "No; it is not for that. I will tell you the reason some time. And—and—if you want to tell her very much now, you may."

"I will call her, then," said Jack; and he tapped at the door of separation and uttered a formal "Mrs. Frost, may I trouble you to come for a minute?" through the keyhole.

"She *will* be astonished," said Mamy, with a nervous laugh, as the door opened, and Eila, serene and beautiful, entered with her thimble on her finger and a threaded needle hastily stuck in the bosom of her dress.

"Did you call me, Mr. Wilton?"

"I did, Mrs. Frost," replied Jack, with entire composure. "I wanted to ask your permission to introduce my future wife to you." And thereupon he took Mamy by the hand and led her forward. "Won't you wish us good luck?"

"Mamy! Mr. Wilton! You don't mean it? What will mother say? I *can't* believe you are in earnest."

Eila spoke in breathless and uncertain tones. The announcement had come so suddenly that she had no time to weigh the "for" and "against" with any kind of certainty, or to adapt her attitude to the result. To lose Sydney without hope of recovery, to forfeit irretrievably the advantages of the connection with the Warden family, was a blow that might well make the *against* weigh down the balance at once. Certainly Mr. Wilton seemed to have money to throw about as he liked; but young men are so careless. He might have been living on his capital, squandering his little fortune all this time, for anything Eila knew to the contrary. And how deceitful Mamy had been not to tell her how things were shaping; for of course she must have known for a long time past that Jack admired her, and that, for

her own part, she was ready to fling herself at his head with the least encouragement he gave her. Eila felt she had not deserved to be treated with so little confidence by her sister. It was not because, in her anxiety to further Mamy's own interests, and perhaps those of the family a little as well, she had favoured Sydney's suit that she merited to be treated as a stranger now. Her voice was drier than Mamy had ever heard it as she said, after a long pause :

"I'm afraid you are not giving yourselves time to think. There are so many things to be considered. Mamy is still very young ; and so are you, for that matter, Mr. Wilton. A wife is sometimes a hindrance to a man in the beginning, if he has to make his way in the world."

A smile of understanding spread upwards from Jack's moustache to the corners of his bright blue eyes. He had divined the cause of young Mrs. Frost's misgivings.

"Mamy will help me to make my way," he said, with cheerful assurance. "I've got a little selection out in Australia that'll keep two people very comfortably ; and when we've made our pile we'll come back and have another fling in Paris."

Eila directed a glance of eager interrogation at her younger sister. A selector's \* wife ! Was that the fate that Mamy could contemplate exchanging in cold blood for the brilliant position offered her by Sydney Warden ? A vision of Mamy in a sun-bonnet, baking the bread in a camp-oven outside a bark hut in the Australian Bush, in the midst of the heat and the flies, flitted instantly through her brain. And the family ? Their only resource would be to drag themselves to the selection on foot, in the character of sun-downers, and camp down round the hut like a tribe of primitive blacks. Well, that might be all they were fit for ; but while she was alive their deserts should be meted out to them after another fashion. If the worst came to the worst, she could still telegraph to Hubert, and it would be Mamy who had driven her to take the fatal step.

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\* "Selector"—one who chooses or selects 350 acres of good land upon the station of a squatter.

When she had left the room, Jack had his arms about his betrothed in an instant. He was so much taller than Mamy that he had to turn her face up to his like a child's in order to look into her eyes. If he had dreaded to read any reluctance in them upon the score of the selection, her bright glance reassured him.

"Your sister isn't best pleased, I'm afraid," he said, in tones of feigned concern. "But I know where the shoe pinches: I'm not rich enough. Perhaps I ought to have asked you first of all, Mamy, if you'd mind very much living in the Bush."

This time the anxiety was genuine. But, strangely enough, even the threat of being exiled to the wilds of Australia did not seem to have the least effect upon Mamy's resolution.

"And you'd live in a slab hut with me?" cried Jack in a fervour of enthusiasm. "You'd give up Paris, and the Français, and Sarah Bernhardt, all for me? Oh, my darling, it beats *me*, I tell you! Well, I only hope I may be able to reward you for it some day as you deserve."

The temptation to tell the truth was never stronger than at this moment. Nevertheless, Jack went away leaving his betrothed under the impression that she had pledged her future to a poor man. Yet radiant as the day Mamy looked as she communicated the news to her mother, upon the return of the latter in the dusk of the evening. The matter was immediately discussed in family conclave, each one giving a different and personal opinion. Jack was liked, and heartily, up to a certain point, by all. But Eila contended that there was no reason why a person who could give her heart to Jack should not be able to give it with equal facility to Sydney. "One wouldn't be a bit more interesting as a companion than the other, she declared, and "what Mamy can see in Jack to make her ready to sacrifice thousands and thousands of pounds for him, to say nothing of ruining all the chances of the family for evermore, I *can't* see."

"She'll never cure him of his English accent, I'll answer for that," said Mrs. Clare gloomily, "for its quite past redemption."

The argument was interrupted by the advent of a little packet for Mamy, who coloured as she received it into her hands, remembering that Jack had insisted upon measuring her finger for an engagement-ring not two hours ago.

Six curious eyes, to say nothing of those of the owner herself, were directed at the little leather box that Mamy, with a nervous smile, detached from its multifarious wrappings. She turned it over. The name of a great Paris house was printed in gold letters round the lower rim.

"How extravagant!" said Eila indignantly; "what right has a selector to go to such a jeweller's as that?"

But sheer astonishment prevented her from saying more. Mamy had lifted the ring from its resting-place upon a mound of white velvet with a half-frightened look, and slipping it upon her finger, silently thrust it forward for approval. The length between the two lower joints of the finger was covered by a triad of precious stones of dazzling brightness and surpassing beauty. A ruby, a sapphire, and a diamond, of grand dimensions and blazing colour, shone and scintillated upon Mamy's pretty hand—pretty with the native prettiness of youth and smoothness, for the care bestowed upon it by its proprietor was of the slightest.

Eila drew a long breath.

"How too magnificent! I thought only queens could have such rings. But Jack must be out of his senses. Who ever saw a selector's wife washing her husband's Crimeans with such a ring on as that?"

Mrs. Clare meanwhile had fastened an eager gaze upon the ruby.

"Why, I do believe it isn't very far behind the one Hubert has in his possession. It is very strange. I really think we ought to make a few inquiries about your young man, Mamy, my dear. I don't want to frighten you, but there have been extraordinary cases of burglars passing themselves off for gentlemen, and we can't be too careful in a place like Paris."

"Oh, but Hubert knows Jack, mother," expostulated Mamy indignantly.

Mrs. Clare raised her eyebrows meaningly.



"I'm not too sure of Hubert himself. Where has he disappeared to all this time and what has he done with the ruby?"

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## CHAPTER XV.

## EILA'S REMORSE.

IT was the first European spring the Clare family had seen, and indescribably beautiful it appeared to their unaccustomed eyes. Despite the sudden clouding over of a cerulean April sky, and the scattering of sleet and raindrops upon their common umbrella, the days were few when Eila and her sisters failed to reconnoitre their favourite haunts in the Luxembourg Gardens, and rhapsodize over the circlets of green that wreathed the black elm-branches, or the sheets of pink and white blossoms that decked the apple-trees, planted espalier-wise, in the orchard part of the garden. Jack, it is needless to say, was invariably of the party, though his enthusiasm for spring glories was less marked than that of his companions. Perhaps he bestowed so much upon Mamy that he had none left to lavish upon Mother Nature. Every time he returned to the hotel, he would tell himself that the comedy had lasted long enough. Next day he would send rivulets of precious stones and mountains of costly stuffs to his darling. He would tell her that she might choose a palace for her habitation, and a four-storied manion for the family. What would she say when she learnt that she was about to wed a silver-king, and to become in her own sweet little person a silver-queen? If she had read the papers, or been in correspondence with Australian friends—nay, if the Wardens, of whom she had spoken to him so often, had known that she was engaged to him—the knowledge of his wealth must perforce have reached her ears. But, like the rest of her family, Mamy dwelt (as it seemed to her lover) in a kind of world of her own. Not the real world—as Jack knew it himself, where

men and women nourish all sorts of worldly ambitions, and are tremendously interested in criticising each other's sayings and doings—but in a fancy-world belonging to the Clare family exclusively, in which it was not necessary to take any thought for the morrow, though one might speculate unendingly upon the mysteries of a far-off hereafter. But every day, after making the aforesaid resolution, Jack would defer carrying it out. It was indescribably sweet to him to obtain fresh proof that he was cared for in the only way in which it is worth being cared for at all—that is to say, for himself alone. He had had, it is true, to submit to a cross-examination concerning his princely gift of the ring, but had declared that the jewels were heirlooms never to be parted with excepting in the case of pressing necessity, and that he had merely had them reset for Mamy, to whom they would belong henceforth. Eila was quite sure now that he was recklessly spending his capital, and that he would take Mamy back to a selector's hut, bare of everything save a camp-bed and a tin basin. He was like those shearers, she declared, who knock down their cheque in a week's orgy in town. It could not be denied, however, that Jack's orgy was of a highly respectable kind. Mrs. Clare had washed her hands of him as a pupil, and he found courting Mamy a more congenial occupation than the conjugating of the irregular verbs. He still invited the family to the theatre, and though they protested upon principle, and Eila would say, "There goes an easy-chair for Mamy," or, "You might have had no end of rugs for the hut for the money those tickets cost," upon every fresh occasion, they invariably ended by accepting. Jack had given them but few details concerning his family, who were in London at that moment. He suggested that the wedding should take place quietly in Paris, after which he would write to his people, and announce that he intended producing his bride to them on his way through London.

"I always told 'em I should be married that way if I ever married at all," he said. "My sisters are so curious. If I let out that I was engaged they'd be wanting to come over to Paris directly, and we shouldn't have a moment to our-

selves. I'm of age, and I'm my own master. I know what I'm about, I tell you ;" and so forth.

The explanation of Jack's conduct, which, however, he did not divulge to his Paris friends, was a fear lest the *quatrième* and its inmates might reflect in the eyes of his own conventional belongings upon the wife he had chosen. When he had Mamy to himself it would be all right. And meanwhile, as fortune had decreed that he should suddenly become a millionaire, and as father, mother, and sisters owed the astonishing circumstance that they had likewise come into unexpected wealth to himself alone, Jack considered that he had purchased the privilege of conducting his private affairs as privately as he might please, and of presenting his bride to his kith and kin after, instead of before, his wedding, if such were his good pleasure.

Eila, meanwhile, was greatly exercised upon the question of the coming marriage. Mamy gone, there would be one mouth less to feed. Then, Reginald had promised supplies, and if she could hold out until they came, Hubert might be allowed to remain away indefinitely. If Reginald had only been at hand to counsel her ! She waited with ever-increasing anxiety for the answer to her letter to him. The telegram had doubtless contained the pith of his arguments, but she still had to learn how her communication had affected his sentiment for her. She felt that things would have been easier if her brother had behaved differently, but since his return Dick had relapsed into a mood of self-concentrated gloom that made it difficult for her to confide in him. Mamy's engagement seemed to have had the unaccountable effect of estranging him from her as well. He never took part in the walking, driving, or sight-seeing expeditions, and only made a concession in favour of the theatre when he had a mind to see some particular play. He seemed to take it for granted that money must be forthcoming when necessary, and Eila found a secret excuse for her own weakness in hiding the news of the catastrophe from him on the plea that it would divert his mind from his work. Dick went mechanically to the studio, but brought back no more amusing tales, as in former times, of the students. One or two

life-studies of a model's back that his sister found in cleaning his room appeared to her uninitiated eyes marvels of promise. Who could tell? He might be pondering some great work in his mind, the achievement of which would bring him fame and fortune in one glorious day. A favourite dream of Eila's at this time was that the family should discover that *the* picture of the year at the Salon had been painted by Dick. As by the stroke of a magic wand they would all be lifted to a pinnacle of prosperity immediately, and by what a joyful means! The vision was such a fascinating one that Eila felt as though she would have consented to lay down her life to have it realized.

But there were times when these fancies brought her no consolation. In spite of all her efforts, her little hoard was fast melting away. She could not accuse herself of extravagance. The family *menus* were very elementary and simple, though the days of bone-broth and boiled eggs for dinner—or of bone-broth and bread alone—were over. This hard cash—these diabolical little rounds of metal without which we may starve as in a desert in the midst of plenty—were beginning to be sorely needed. Reginald's fifty pounds had gone to settle the doctor's bill for her mother's illness and other pressing claims. Her own savings were well-nigh exhausted. And yet while there were so many possibilities of rescue, she told herself that she could surely have patience for a little while longer. A great oppression seemed to have been lifted from her daily life by the absence of Hubert. If he could but have continued to play the part of the slave of the lamp without wanting to appropriate her, she felt that she would have hailed his return with unfeigned joy and relief. But now he appeared almost like an ogre lying in wait to devour her. Another fancy she indulged in was that she would call Hubert back (and it occasioned her a half-sympathizing shudder when she pictured his feelings as he came to open the telegram containing the words "Open, sesame!") and agree to *all* his conditions. He should thereupon settle a sum upon the family that would place them out of the reach of want for evermore. Then she would pay her debt. He should not be able to say she had cheated him.

And then—having written a letter to her mother and to Reginald—she would uncork that long-neglected octagonal blue bottle, the gift of the true-hearted chemist's assistant in Hobart, and, applying it to her lips, gasp away in one short second all the burden of shame and dishonour and dreary struggle and shattered hopes that overcame and ruined her life. The impossibility of providing Mamy with a suitable trousseau under the actual circumstances was another argument in favour of recalling Hubert. In her lighter moods she would pack an imaginary trunk with an imaginary outfit for the Bush. And there was nothing, even to the buff leather shoes for board-ship wear, that she neglected to take account of in filling in the details of the unreal equipment. The question of the trousseau was settled, however, unexpectedly one day by no other person than the bridegroom-elect, who disposed of it in an off-hand way that charmed and terrified Eila at the same time. It was upon the occasion of his announcing triumphantly that he had succeeded in gaining Mamy's consent to an immediate marriage at the Embassy under the sanction and protection of English laws.

"Oh! but she has nothing ready," pleaded Eila. She was walking home with her future brother-in-law across the Luxembourg Gardens, while Mamy and Truca hurried on in front to waylay Dick on his return from the studio.

"That doesn't matter. We'll fix her up all right after the wedding's over," said Jack, with an air of easy assurance.

"But she'll need so many things," objected Eila, "and we *have* to calculate, you know; and—and Paris is *very* expensive," she added, crimsoning.

Jack feigned to look concerned.

"Is it? Well, I suppose it can't be helped. Anyhow, Mrs. Frost, Mamy's *my* property now, so I'll only ask your help in the matter of advising her what to choose. But if she wants a frock to be married in, and a few little things at once, I've got a hundred pounds I'll ask you to lay out for me. You know I can't get her to take anything but the ring until we're man and wife. But she'll be more reasonable by-and-by, I expect."

Joy mingled with alarm filled Eila's breast. The handling of a hundred pounds for immediate use on Mamy's behalf was such an unexpected realization of her vision that she looked steadfastly at the Luxembourg elms, with their sprouting green leaves, to assure herself that they were real and tangible. As the leaves continued to flicker under the April sun, and Jack's voice sounded very real, she concluded that her dream was a reality, and her next step was to utter the hesitating disclaimer :

"You won't mind if I say something that perhaps I ought not to say. Only you do seem a little careless about money. Don't you think you and Mamy may be very sorry some day that you spent so much in Paris ? You know she has not a penny of her own in the world."

Jack stroked his blond moustache with an air of reflection, successfully concealing by this manœuvre the smile that hovered round his lips.

"I was never much of a hand at saving, that's a fact," he said penitently ; "but you needn't be afraid, Mrs. Frost, I assure you. I've no intention of outrunning the constable, I tell you. Why, what do you suppose my little selection in New South Wales brings me in a year ? You'll see that there is a margin for putting by if one cares about it."

Jack had yielded to a sudden and childish desire to astonish his sister-in-law to be, for once in her life, by revealing to her the real facts of the case. Why, indeed, should he prolong the mystery any longer ? He had received all the proofs his heart could wish for that his sweet little betrothed was marrying him for himself, not for a silver-mine of the very existence of which she was ignorant, and as for this lovely and enigmatic young matron, whom he had seen for the first time in the character of an undress *figurante* upon the boards of a low theatre, and ever since in that of a pure household guardian angel, he was convinced that she was as disinterested, and guileless, and innocent, and generally helpless, as the remainder of her helpless family. It would be good fun, Jack thought, to see her open those beautiful dark eyes in wonder. And the time seemed ripe, too, for conveying to her the welcome informa-

tion that mere money troubles need weigh upon her mind no longer, as he had reason to think that the family was suffering from peculiarly straitened means at the present moment.

"Well, you don't give a guess," he said, laughing, as he watched her puzzled expression.

It flashed across young Mrs. Frost's mind at this moment, as a kind of wild, unreasoning hope, that perhaps Mr. Wilton really was richer than he had professed to be, and that the loss to the family by Mamy's rejection of Sydney Warden might not prove so entirely disastrous in its consequences as she had allowed herself to believe.

"I am so stupid about money," she observed diffidently, mightily elated at the same time by the gleam of encouragement she detected in Jack's blue eyes. "It is a selection, you say? Six hundred acres, I suppose?"

"Not so much."

Her face fell a little.

"I don't think one can make very much out of an un-cleared selection. It all depends upon how much there is under cultivation, and upon water frontage and seasons. No, I should never guess," a little despondingly. "From two to three hundred a year, perhaps?"

"Go on," said Jack quietly; "I will stop you when you reach the figure."

"Four, then—five, six, seven. Oh, Mr. Wilton, it can't be; you must be joking! Do you mean that really you make seven hundred a year?"

"And the rest," said Jack flippantly. "My dear Mrs. Frost, you are a long way behind in your guesses. Now, to facilitate your calculations, I would suggest your counting by thousands. Begin at ten thousand pounds, and go on, and on, and on—don't be afraid—until I tell you to stop. But, good Lord! what is the matter with you? Don't, please; I am quite in earnest . . . but—but have I said anything to *hurt* you?"

"No—oh no! I can't help it!" gasped Eila. "Let me sit down, please."

She was trembling all over, and white as a ghost, and as

Jack, much alarmed, led her by the arm to a bench, and pressed her down upon it with brotherly tenderness, sobs of hysteric vehemence broke from her one after the other in rapid succession.

"Are you ill? What shall I do? Is it my fault? What is the matter? Shall I run after your sister and call her?" queried Jack breathlessly.

The worthy fellow hardly knew what he was saying in the terror occasioned him by Eila's condition, in the first place, and by the fear of seeing a gesticulating French crowd close around the bench in the second.

"Oh, I am better," sighed young Mrs. Frost at last, pressing her hand to her side with unconsciously theatrical effect.

Tears had come to her relief. She pulled out an inadequate little square of printed cotton, in the guise of a three-sou handkerchief, and wept freely into it, holding it against her eyes with both hands, unmindful, apparently, of the curious glances that, to Jack's immense discomfiture, were beginning to be directed towards them by the passers-by.

"That's all right!" he said reassuringly, as her sobs subsided. "You'll be better now. Pull yourself together. I suppose it's my fault. But how could I dream you would take it that way? I never heard of a person being knocked over like that before by a bit of good news. I tell you——"

"A bit of good news!" repeated Eila, laughing through her tears in joyous derision. "Oh, Mr. Wilton, I may tell you now. You've never known—you never *can* have known—what it is to go through the anxiety that I have suffered on account of those you love!"

"Well, you needn't think of it any more," said Jack soothingly. "Mammy will set 'em all up nicely. My selection is a silver-mine. There's the explanation of the mystery. I meant to let you count up to seventy thousand. It brings me in more than that a year, but I can't tell you the exact sum. Anyhow, you see there's more than enough to *doter* you all. Isn't that the French word for it—eh?"

Eila was silent. The quivering green was beginning to look unreal once more. The sandy Luxembourg soil seemed



to wave up and down. Jack's advice to her to pull herself together was, after all, the best she could follow at this instant. By-and-by she would be able to think more clearly. Seventy thousand! Seventy thousand pounds, that was to say! Not francs; Jack had clearly said *pounds*. Besides, he never counted in francs. Why, a little unconsidered trifle extracted from such a sum as that (which, moreover, as it appeared, was merely the revenue, the interest on the capital, not the capital itself) would be enough to rid them of the nightmare of poverty for ever. Was it to her that this marvellous piece of "Arabian Nights" luck had happened? Upon her and her family that this heaven-sent miracle had alighted? If it were so indeed, some unexpected catastrophe must follow. Even in fairy-stories such marvels did not occur without somebody being sacrificed. An earthquake or a plague must ensue. Or one of the family would be run over. From whatever quarter the thunderbolt might descend, it could not fail to fall soon. But, meanwhile, might she not indulge for one transient hour in the rapture of repeating to herself that her wildest dreams, her most extravagant castles in the air—higher than Jacob's ladder itself—had been converted into actual prosaic facts? As for this Australian Jupiter, who had descended upon the *quatrième* in a shower of gold, what would he say if he could know how hard she had essayed to drive him away? With an effusiveness born of the intoxication of the hour, Eila laid her hand on the young man's arm, and said, half laughing, half crying:

"Oh, Mr. Wilton, I have a confession to make to you. I was angry with my sister for consenting so quickly to be your wife. It wasn't that I didn't like you and believe in you. We all did that. But I thought you were poor—and—and rather reckless for a poor man; and knowing that Mamy might make a rich marriage (I am sure she has told you about it herself), I did all I could to persuade her not to have you."

Her voice faltered. What would have been her feelings, she reflected, if her machinations had been successful, and if, after driving Jack away, she had discovered too late that

she had closed the legitimate door of entrance to the Aladdin's cave for ever?

Jack, for his part, appeared in no way discomposed by the confession. Perhaps in his secret heart he was grateful to the fair penitent for the *rôle* she had played. He answered her that the only effect of her story was to make him fonder of her sister than ever, if such a thing were possible. He gloried in this fresh proof of Mammy's disinterested attachment, and pressed his companion, now that she was making a clean breast of it, to tell him as much as she would about the situation of the family, and how he could be the most useful to them.

"As for your wanting your sister to marry a rich fellow," he said encouragingly, "it was quite right and natural of you—all the more that you'd known him all your lives, while me you didn't know from Adam. And I hope you'll tell me how you're off for money, and what you've got to depend on, and all that. I've thought sometimes you might have been badly in want of a friend that first night I saw you—you know where."

Eila coloured painfully at the allusion. She had almost begun to cherish the illusion that Jack had forgotten the circumstances of their first meeting. Still, the cordial sympathy of his manner encouraged her to respond to his appeal, and to make, as he had said himself, a clean breast of it.

Therefore she told him the family history from the beginning, shielding mother, brothers, and sisters from blame by taking it all upon herself. She was the manager, the treasurer, the working head. It was owing to her not knowing how to calculate expenses properly that they had come to grief in the first instance. She had never thought of taking unforeseen disasters like her mother's illness into account, and when she had appeared at the Folies-Fantassin for the first and last time, the family was on the verge of starvation. Then had occurred the final and crushing catastrophe of the failure of the insurance company whence they drew their only means of living. How she had hidden the disaster from her family, in the hope of finding a way

of succour before overwhelming them with the news; how she longed for remunerative work, but knew neither where to find it nor how to set about obtaining it; how Hubert had come to the rescue for several weeks—not in a settled, regular way, but by providing them with restaurant dinners and pleasures beyond their means; and how she had wanted to ask him to help them in a more practical, permanent fashion, but was afraid to do so (this portion of her story was less explicit than the rest), she narrated in broken sentences, drawing aimless patterns the while in the gravel at her feet with the point of her umbrella.

Jack listened as an elder brother might have done, albeit he was the younger of the two. His comment upon the story was that she had undoubtedly been through a rough time, but if his word went for anything, she and her belongings had come to the end of their troubles for good and all.

“But what beats *me*,” he added, confidentially, “is the way your cousin behaved. Why, he gets more out of the mine than I do! I’d be afraid to say what Hubert de Merle is worth at the present moment, I tell you!” Here Jack’s voice sank to an impressively mysterious key. “But he was always a peculiar chap, though he is awfully clever—I’ll say that for him—and has been a very good friend to me into the bargain. Still, we can get on without Master Hubert, if he takes it into his head to keep out of the way. By-the-by, I suppose you are the only relations he’s got in the world to leave his money to, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know,” said Eila, with a little frown; “I never thought about it. One does not like to think of people dying for the sake of getting their money. And Hubert is not very old. He might marry somebody still.”

“Marry somebody! Hubert?” More eloquent than any protestation was the incredulous wonder conveyed in Jack’s accents. “You’re not in earnest! Besides, he hates women, and no wonder, poor fellow!”

A faint half-smile fluttered round the corners of Eila’s pensive mouth. She hastened to change the current of the conversation by asking when Mamy might be informed of

the wonderful destiny that awaited her, a destiny so wonderful, indeed, that she herself could hardly believe, even now, that what Jack had just told her was not all a dream.

"I have fancied such extravagant things sometimes," she said. "I began to build castles in the air when I was quite little, and though it is so foolish, I like to let myself build them still. But I never fancied anything half so wonderful as what you have told me to-day. What *will* mother and Mamy say? I am so wildly impatient to rush and tell them this minute."

"No; pray don't!" said Jack earnestly. "I am keeping the news for my present to your sister on our wedding-day. I don't know what induced me to let the cat out of the bag to you as I did, but I knew you were to be trusted. All I ask you is not to say a word about it to your people for the present."

And Eila was fain to do as Jack demanded. She did not give the required pledge with the best grace in the world, for the secret was already burning to make its escape. She had carried the knowledge of evil times locked in her breast without any difficulty, but to bear a load of joy unshared by the family was quite another thing. Upon parting from Jack, who was to come and convey the family to the restaurant after going to his hotel, she walked back to the Boulevard de l'Observatoire in a kind of dream. She told herself that as the prospective sister-in-law of an "archi-millionaire" she might buy an English *Times* at the paper-shop where it was sold farther down the boulevard, but, from force of habit, reproached herself for her extravagance as she drew forth eight sous wherewith to pay for her purchase. It was curious, upon returning, to find Mamy on her knees in the kitchen filling the scuttle with coke for the declining stove. An involuntary awe of her sister as of a princess in disguise was Eila's first sensation. She mentally compared her to the king's daughter, in Grimm's tales, who drove the geese to the pond. Such an imperative desire to seize Mamy in her arms and shriek out the miraculous tidings to her there and then took possession of her soul, that in the dread of yielding to the temptation she fled to her room, and, meet-

ing Truca on the way, clasped the child to her heart in a fervent embrace. The little girl had not been used to these demonstrations of love, and responded by clinging round her sister's neck, until she was lifted in the air and carried along in Eila's arms as in the days of her babyhood.

"I shall lose my senses before Mamy is married, that is certain," said Eila to herself, but she found an outlet for her overpowering emotions by fondling Truca. Her bonnet and boa laid by after being carefully brushed and shaken (she had developed a respect for her wardrobe unknown in the Cowa era of her existence), she sat herself down to enjoy the *Times*, or, at least, to make an effort to recover her self-possession by studying its columns. Vain attempt! The words she read penetrated her brain, but took not the slightest effect upon her mind. She read that there had been an earthquake in Japan, whereby whole villages had been swept away and thousands of her fellow-creatures destroyed; that there were two fresh cases of suicide in the German army; that a disastrous mining accident, by which seventeen miners were killed and ten times seventeen entombed, had occurred the day before in Wales; and she found herself assimilating these tidings with no clearer sensation than that of a complete and half-incredulous indifference. She could not realize that men and women should continue to be tortured out of an existence where marvels of the kind that had happened to herself, were possible. The Japanese, crushed out of life by falling walls, appeared to her like far-away puppets, whose cries and groans had an echo of unreality. She laid down the paper, wondering at her own numbness, and trying to analyze it, like a person who discovers that one of his limbs is bereft of sensation, and considers whether it can be frozen. The heading, however, of a telegram that caught her eye as she took up the paper again brought back the apprehension of real things with a rush. The words ran, "*Fatal Drowning Accident at Cannes*," and in the same paragraph the name of Warden seemed to leap out of the printed page and imperiously claim her attention. How she read the paragraph to the end without crying out or attracting Truca's notice by an

involuntary ejaculation of dismay was a fact she wondered at afterwards. Was this, she asked herself, the first warning of the approach of the malignant Nemesis she had dreaded? The telegram narrated in unsympathetic newspaper style the death by drowning of a young Englishman of the name of Warden, staying, in company with his mother and sister, at the Hôtel Métropole at Cannes. He had gone out alone, as it appeared, in a sailing boat, and it was conjectured that he had been imprudent enough to allow himself to fall asleep after making his sail fast, for those who had observed the accident from the shore declared that the boat had capsized because the sail had not been let out at a critical moment. The body of the victim had been recovered entangled in the sail. Had it not been for this circumstance, he might have been easily rescued, for though the boat was far out, those who had witnessed the disaster from the shore had put out immediately to its assistance.

The paper dropped from Eila's fingers; she covered her eyes with her hands, pressing her palms into the sockets and swallowing down the hysteric lump that rose unbidden in her throat. A terrible and unreasoning fear had seized her—the fear that Sydney had gone voluntarily to his death under the blue Mediterranean waves. How tenfold more awful the vision of his sturdy form, rigid in its coffin, would appear, if Mamy or she had ever so remote a share in bringing it there! But Mamy's share was as nothing compared with her own. Had she not in her insatiable desire to lure money into the family prevented her sister from discarding Sydney once and for all, and done her utmost to keep him in the toils? Perhaps the news of Mamy's engagement had come when his hopes were highest, and the sudden and unexpected blasting of them had driven him to take his life in a moment of desperation. Yet to couple Sydney's image with suicide appeared both monstrous and improbable. To connect it with death was hardly possible. Eila immediately resolved to conceal the news from her sister until the wedding was over. She could not answer for the effect it might have upon Mamy. What if it should produce a revulsion of feeling towards Jack—cause Mamy to put off the wed-

ding, or take some other ill-considered step prejudicial to her marriage? No! In her own interest Mamy must be kept in ignorance of the fatal tidings until she should be safely anchored in the harbour of matrimony. By warning Jack, and looking over the papers and letters addressed to the *quatrième*, Eila reflected that she might tide over the next few days until the risk of a catastrophe was averted. She therefore cut out the column containing the account of the disaster, and, after reading it over once more with a heavy heart, tore it into bits and scattered it to the winds of heaven. Mamy was warbling recklessly as she moved about the adjoining room, and the shrill gay notes jarred upon Eila's ears, in which a sea-dirge would have sounded more fitting at the present moment.

"Mamy!" she called sharply through the door that opened into the adjoining room, "stop yelling a moment and answer me. Did you write to—to Cannes to say that you were engaged?"

"Yes," shouted Mamy, breaking into a fresh warble an instant later.

"You did? Can't you be quiet for a moment? And did you receive an answer?"

"No."

Here a roulade, accompanied by a sound as of the raking out of coals, caused Eila to say more sharply than ever:

"Mamy, you will drive me mad! When did you post the letter? Is there time for you to have had an answer?"

"I don't know," called out her sister; "I don't think so. What does it matter?"

"Matter?" retorted Eila bitterly; "nothing to you, perhaps." The last three words, however, were uttered *sotto voce*. Nor did the speaker believe in her own mind that there was any real foundation for them. The proof lay in the care she took that the fatal news she had learned should not travel any farther. It was with a feeling as of one who commits a real crime that she intercepted, two days later, a black-edged envelope addressed to her sister in Mrs. Warden's handwriting. If the letter it contained should reach the person to whom it was addressed, farewell to the joyous

anticipations of the bridal ceremony fixed for the ensuing Monday. The news of the death of her rejected lover arriving in answer to the letter announcing her engagement to Jack would distress Mamy beyond measure. Yet the letter might be of a kind that required an immediate answer. Eila turned the lugubrious missive, with its deep black border, over and over in her hands before she could summon the resolution to open it. Granted that she knew exactly how matters stood, granted even that Mamy would have been the first to bid her read the letter had she been by, the *rôle* of spy was odious and distasteful to her. But the end must justify the means. "I will say just what I did, and why I did it, when the time comes," she repeated to herself, and so saying deliberately unfastened the envelope. It startled her to draw therefrom an open letter in Mamy's own handwriting. This, at least, she could have no right to examine, as the writer had not taken her into her confidence respecting the contents. There was a second letter, however, in Mrs. Warden's handwriting, and it was with an ever-increasing sense of guilt that Eila unfolded it and read as follows:

"MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

"A heart-broken mother returns you the enclosed letter addressed to her beloved son. It was put into my hands the evening of the day when the awful event took place. I have been too utterly prostrated to write before, and Lucy, poor girl! is almost beside herself with grief. I had no idea the letter was from you until I opened it, and discovered to my intense surprise that my poor dear lad had requested the honour of your hand, and that you had deemed it expedient to refuse him, having pledged your affections to another.

"He might have taken his mother into his confidence, for what should I have considered but his happiness?—though doubtless I should have advised him to wait, and you too, being both somewhat young to know your own minds. But it is no use referring to that now. If I were able to think of anything but the awful calamity that has



befallen us, I would congratulate you on your engagement to Mr. Wilton, who, if I am not mistaken, has an interest in the great Gunga silver-mine. But perhaps it is another Mr. Wilton. If anything could bring us the least spark of consolation in our dreadful trial, it would be the great kindness and sympathy shown us by our fellow-travellers at the hotel, many of them people of title. Lady Alice, an unmarried second daughter of an Irish peer, is devoted to my poor Lucy. I think (but this is quite between ourselves) that she has special reason for sharing in our grief. Without being exactly a lady's man, dear Sydney was very popular with our sex. I know that your mother and sisters and brothers will feel for us in our profound affliction. We are not without the comforting ministrations of the chaplain, the Honourable Mr. Bene, but it is hard to say 'God's will be done' in these cases.

"Yours sincerely in great grief,

"ARABELLA WARDEN.

"P. S.—Perhaps you have not heard the terrible news. I fancied everybody must know. Our beloved Sydney was drowned by the capsizing of a boat that he must needs go sailing in by himself on the afternoon of the 11th. There was an account of the disaster in the *Times*, and most of the English and foreign papers as well."

Mamy's letter, which Eila next perused, upon the well-known principle that you may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb—a principle, by the way, which is occasionally responsible for carrying us much farther than we intended to go—was a short, frank, kindly epistle wherein the writer referred gratefully to Sydney's constant attachment, but declared that it was impossible now, as it had been from the beginning, to feel towards him otherwise than as a sister. She briefly announced her engagement to Jack Wilton, and concluded with the trust that Sydney would find someone to care for him as he deserved.

"There are so many girls better looking and better educated than I am," concluded the writer naïvely; "it will

not be hard for you to find a wife of that sort, and as long as I live I shall always remain, your sincere and grateful and affectionate friend,

MAMY CLARE."

Two sensations resulted to Eila from her secret perusal of the intercepted letters. The first was a great and overwhelming sense of relief at the certainty that Sydney had never known the fact of her sister's engagement, and the second and less amiable sensation was a secret sense of triumph induced by the reflection that Mrs. Warden had now the proof that a member of the despised Clare family had refused the hand of her son. To grieve keenly for the strong young life cut off in its prime was not in Eila's power. Her own experiences had led her to attach but little value, theoretically, to the boon of existence. In her pessimistic moods, the grammatical definition which makes the verb "to be" synonymous with the verb "to suffer" appeared to her true in a deeper sense than that attributed to it by Lindley Murray. Nevertheless, she felt that the vision of Sydney's dead face, with the sea washing over it, and the obstinate hair, that would never lie straight, swaying up and down beneath the waves, would haunt her imagination for many a day to come. She did not believe that Mrs. Warden's grief would be incurable. A mother whose heart was really broken would have no thought to spare for Lady Alices and Honourable Mr. Benes. She considered, indeed, that of all those who had known and loved Sydney, his own family not excepted, Mamy would mourn for him in the most wholehearted fashion. For herself, she could not deny that the extent of her grief was greatly influenced by the relation in which he stood to her family. If he had still represented the goal of her ambition for Mamy, she felt that she would have reasoned less philosophically about the doubtful advantage of being cut off in the flush of early manhood, while one had health and wealth, and friends in plenty to make life so well worth living. How to answer Mrs. Warden's letter was the problem that diverted her mind from the afore-mentioned unsatisfying reflections. Once you engage yourself on the path of deceit, it is astonishing how circum-

stances arise to lead you on. Evidently there was nothing for it but to answer Mrs. Warden in Mamy's name.

"A little more, and I should forge her handwriting," Eila said to herself bitterly; "but she will forgive me, she *must* forgive me, when she knows why I acted so."

Fortified by this reflection, young Mrs. Frost stole down the staircase a couple of hours later carrying a letter addressed to the Hôtel Métropole, Cannes, which she posted with her own hands. She was not wholly dissatisfied with her composition. In alluding to Sydney's death, and remembering that, after all, it was to Sydney's own mother she was writing, a natural impulse of sympathy had come spontaneously. She had felt herself capable of shedding tears of real emotion if she had encountered Mrs. Warden at the moment of writing, and words of tender regret for the dead, and genuine pity for the living, flowed unsought from her pen. To excuse Mamy from writing upon the score of the shock she had received in the midst of her bridal preparations seemed fitting enough, and so used was Eila now to her self-assumed *rôle* of arch-plotter, in behalf of the welfare of the family, that the remorse induced by her own deceit was forgotten as soon as her letter was posted. But she thought the matter over on her return, as she mounted the sixty odd steps that were to land her upon the *quatrième*.

"What aim have I," she said to herself, "excepting to spare Mamy and the rest unnecessary pain and distress? If the little deceit I practised fulfils this, and is only temporary, why need I torment myself about it? It is only if it should fail, and I were found out, that I should feel I was to blame, since the sole justification for deceiving is that the deceit should be skilful enough to be entirely successful."

## CHAPTER XVI.

## AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

WHENCE the sword of Damocles that Eila's imagination had forged was to descend upon the *quatrième* before the day fixed for Mamy's wedding, she herself could not have told. But it is a fact that she never got up in the morning without a fresh terror of what the coming fourteen hours were to bring, and never went to bed at night without a feeling of relief and elation at the reflection that another day had been safely lived through. When the great morning actually arrived, she could not deny that Fortune had played into her hands. Mamy, indeed, had been heard to wonder occasionally at Sydney's obstinate silence in view of the news she had sent him.

"I suppose he is sulking," she remarked to Eila on the morning of her wedding, a remark which made young Mrs. Frost wince inwardly. "I thought better of him, all the same, and I shall tell him so too, next time I see him."

This was the only allusion, however, made by the bride to her former lover. An hour later she had forgotten Sydney's existence, as, arrayed in the white cashmere that Eila and she had selected for the occasion, she sat in state by the window of the reception-room waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom. Jack had no clearer notions respecting the etiquette of courtship and marriage than Mamy herself, and could not be withheld from accompanying the bride and her family to his own wedding. Mamy waited for him, therefore, in her bridal bravery, "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," with her heart beating recognisably faster than usual. Eila had insisted upon engaging the services of a theatrical hairdresser, who had utterly transformed the seraph head by gathering the rebellious locks into a structure designated as a *coiffure à la Henri quatre*. The air of stepping out of an old-world court that it conferred upon Mamy enchanted her elder sister, who could hardly find words in which to express her admiration.

"To grace a cottage or adorn a palace.' How does it go ?

That is what you look fit for now, Mamy! What will Jack say? Your hair is all turned back into a lovely square from your forehead, and your head looks so exquisitely small and shapely. You should always have it done like that—upon great occasions, at least, you know—and wear pearl ornaments with it.”

“To be sure—when there is a sheep sale at the selection, for instance,” laughed Mamy.

“Yes, when there is a sheep sale,” assented Eila glee-fully, but with such a meaning air that Mamy said quickly:

“I am sure you know something you haven’t told me, Eila. I believe Jack’s selection is quite a big station, for I noticed that all of a sudden you grew quite reconciled to the match. You would never have changed so if you did not think Jack better off than he says.”

“He will tell you all about it himself, dear, by-and-by,” was Eila’s complacent reply.

Despite her efforts, she could not restrain a certain tremulous note of triumph from vibrating in her voice. Her highest air-castle was on the point of becoming a tangible fact. The fairy prince had assumed the shape of a real flesh-and-blood suitor, and little penniless, Bohemian Mamy, without introductions into society, without money or accomplishments or influence of any kind, had landed what was perhaps the greatest prize of the year in the matrimonial market. At present she had no conception of the significance of money. “A thousand pounds or a hundred thousand must bear almost equal proportions in her eyes, but she will soon learn,” said Eila to herself. “Wait until she and Jack throw off their incognito and appear as silver-king and silver-queen in London or Paris, with a magnificent house, and a yacht, and carriages, and lackeys in livery. *Then* Mamy will see what the possession of millions signifies in the world. What a mighty influence it will give them, too! Only she and Jack have no ambition. I think Mamy will want to help everybody who comes begging of them. But of course she will think of us all first; and afterwards, if she likes to lay aside ten or twenty thousand a year for charity, I am sure it would be enough, and she and Jack

might enjoy the rest of their income to their hearts' content."

Apropos of "all of us," Mrs. Clare had not been forgotten in the preparations for celebrating her daughter's marriage. Jack's hundred pounds had been transformed by Eila into such multifarious packages of wearing apparel of every description (the nucleus of the bride's trousseau being included therein) that for the entire week preceding the wedding a constant procession of blue-coated, nickel-buttoned emissaries from the Bon Marché and Louvre crossed each other on the staircase that led to the *quatrième*. The enigmatic family *d'outre-mer* assumed a place in the imagination of the concierge pair that bordered on the miraculous. While unending parcels, for which cash had evidently been paid, flowed in an unbroken stream into the apartments, the members of this extraordinary family might still be seen waxing the floor of the *quatrième*, or running out in shabby attire to a neighbouring shop for eggs. One day they drove out in splendour; on the morrow they dined upon bread and broth at home. Their mysterious protector with the hump and the Rubens cloak had disappeared, and morning, noon and night the daughters might be seen in the company of a young man who treated them with all the respect due to "de veritables grandes dames," yet was evidently their protector in his turn. Whence came their mysterious wealth? and might not a certain portion of it be diverted from the *quatrième* to the *loge* below? Many were the conversations exchanged between the evil-looking pair upon this theme. Letters which might possibly contain some compromising statement that could be turned to profit were detained and examined. Alas! they were all written in the barbarous English tongue. It was a question daily mooted whether allies might not be found in the police, when the crowning wonder of all took place in the actual undoubted marriage of "la rousse," as Mamy was called in the concierge vocabulary, to the blue-eyed young man who had accepted the succession of the "bossu." The concierges were only made aware of this astonishing event when the wedding-party returned from the ceremony at the Embassy. True, they had

seen the bridegroom drive to the door in a carriage and pair, and run four by four up the staircase. The woman's quick eyes had also detected the presence of an orchid in the button-hole of an immaculate frock-coat. Half an hour later the enigmatic family had accompanied the visitor down the staircase which the *coiffeur* had previously mounted early in the morning, mother and daughters wearing an attire which was described to the neighbours as "épatant." Mrs. Clare, as I have stated before, had not been neglected, and when Jack passed his wife's family in review before conducting them to the carriages waiting below, he mentally compared them with Mrs. Wilton senior and the Misses Wilton, to the manifest disadvantage of the latter. There was beauty enough among them, he thought, to stock a hundred ordinary households. Happiness, too, is an amazing beautifier. The wonderful and unexpected clearing away of the nightmare that had weighed upon Eila had lent a new radiance to her expression. All that Hubert could have given her, and more, had come into possession of the family; and the means by which it had come might be proclaimed openly upon the housetops. She had not dared to believe in so miraculous a turn of Fortune's wheel. For a whole hour before Jack was to be looked for on the wedding morning her heart had begun to fail her with terror at his non-appearance. Even when he arrived, jubilant, with a magnificent bunch of orchids in a cardboard box for Mamy, she was only partly reassured. Something would certainly happen before the wedding-party was deposited at the Embassy. The horses would fall down, or some one would be taken ill. Even when the perilous journey was successfully accomplished, and the ceremony had begun in real earnest, an agonizing terror overcame her lest that mysterious personage who in novels and plays forbids the banns at the supreme moment should suddenly appear upon the scene. But neither in this nor in any other form did the sword of Damocles descend. The bride and bridegroom lent themselves to the performance with a confiding serenity that spoke volumes for their trust in each other; and Willie, who had been summoned from London to the wedding, and

who had much more in common with his future brother-in-law than Dick, played the part of elder brother, and gave away the bride as though he had done nothing but marry sisters all his life. He had only arrived upon the morning of the wedding, and was therefore less splendid than the rest of the party, notwithstanding the fact that Eila had sent him five pounds to London wherewith to array himself suitably.

The return of the wedding-party to the *quatrième* was conducted with the same disregard of official precedent as the departure. Eila and Truca took their places in the large closed landau of the bride and bridegroom, who sat upon opposite seats, holding each other's hands, and looking far more like a suddenly rejuvenated Darby and Joan than a young couple who had only just been made man and wife. Mute pæans were rising from Eila's heart as she drove along. Could it be that the pale spectre of Want had been driven from the family hearth for ever? She looked at her brother-in-law's sunny face with a reverential wonder as at that of some Heaven-sent deliverer. Truca for her part gazed solemnly at the wedded pair, revolving the marriage problem from her own childish standpoint, and not understanding why her sister should be suddenly willing to leave her home and go away with a strange man.

There were signs of perturbation in the concierge's den as the wedding-party prepared to pass it on their way up to the *quatrième*. Jack had filled his waistcoat-pocket with gold coins handy for use. Nothing but gold, and no change received, was the *mot d'ordre* upon his marriage day. The drivers, therefore, had driven away rejoicing, and now it was the turn of the evil-looking pair to be bathed in the Pactolus stream. Eila was too happy to have grudged even the devil himself a share in the general jubilation, but she turned away her eyes from the contemplation of the expression of hideous cupidity that transfigured the countenances of the man and woman as their fingers closed over Jack's golden *pourboires*. When the woman concierge had recovered herself sufficiently from the pleasurable shock the sight of the gold had occasioned her, she ran with servile



deference after the wedding-party, proceeding gaily up the staircase, to wish them first that "*le ciel bénirait leur union*," and next to inform them that a monsieur was waiting to see them in their apartment. Eila's heart sank at this announcement. It was not Hubert, but a stranger—the stranger, no doubt, who had come to cut the thread that held the sword of Damocles suspended over her head. Certainly a monsieur more or less need not have counted to-day, for after locking the scant personal property the family possessed into drawers and boxes, Eila remembered that she had purposely left the apartment open for the convenience of the men who were to bring the wedding-breakfast she had ordered the day before. The stranger might be, after all, only a *chef*, who had come to superintend the laying of the table, or was waiting to know where to place the English wedding-cake that Willie had brought from London as his gift to the bride, and that had not been included in the *menu*. Reassured by this hope, but a little uneasy and apprehensive withal, young Mrs. Frost hurried on in front of the rest up the staircase. She had hardly reached the landing of the *quatrième*, however, when a man's form emerged quickly from the entrance-door to the apartment, that had been left standing open. She raised her eyes startled and curious. The man was Reginald!

How it was that she did not fly into his arms, the consciousness being borne in upon her, at the instant of her seeing him, that all his soul was yearning for her, can only be explained by the fact that Truca was close upon her heels, and that Mamy and her husband were equally close upon the heels of Truca. She did utter a deep-voiced "Reginald!" of utter surprise and emotion, but this need not necessarily have been construed into a welcome. As for Reginald, he was actually too overcome to speak. For a whole year the vision of the treasured form in its shrunken frock had haunted his thoughts by day and his dreams by night, and here it was transformed under his gaze into the vision of a divinely-dressed Parisian lady. Coming straight from Hobart, and being profoundly ignorant of the mysteries of feminine apparel, Reginald might be excused for attributing all

manner of imaginary glories to what was in reality a fresh little toilette enough of a creamy-hued silky material. "What will not contact with the great European world effect?" he thought. His heart failed him for a moment in presence of this radiant and fashionably-attired apparition. What possible explanation of such magnificence could there be if it were not that the hideous sacrifice Eila's letter had spoken of had been accomplished? And what remained for him in that case but to do as Job did, and die? And then the preparations for a feast at this hour of the morning! Had the news of her husband's death, then, been telegraphed by some unknown person to young Mrs. Frost, and had she immediately concluded the bargain with her hunchback cousin, and married him there and then with wild and indecent haste? Fortunately these tragic surmises had hardly had the time to shape themselves in Reginald's brain before the blessed reassurance that was to lift him into the seventh heaven of hope and elation had been given him by Eila herself.

"Reginald!" she had cried, bounding forward: and, as he held out both hands, unable to speak for joy, only looking eagerly and tragically into her eyes, "And on Mamy's wedding-day, of all days in the year!" she had added in joyful tones.

The family was upon them by this time, and instead of gathering his love to his heart—Parisian toilette and all—as Reginald was hungering to do, he had no other resource than to return the pressure of her hands eloquently for one short instant's space. Though there was no time now for an exchange of confidences, the look in her eyes had told him all he wanted to know. The threatened horror had been averted, and she was glad in her heart to see him. What more did he need to be assured of for the present? With this knowledge he could rest content—content? nay, as happy as man need be for the nounce. There was so much to say and to hear. The exclamations of the family as they saw him; the musically nasal voices raised in chorus, bringing back so powerfully the impression of the dear old days at Cowa; the appearance of the bride, radiantly pretty and

becomingly confused ; Truca's piping inquiries after Daisy, and her disappointment at not finding that excellent animal tethered to the stove in the reception-room ; the introduction to the bright and boyish-looking bridegroom, and the startling surmise, uncommunicated to the rest, that this was none other than *the* Jack Wilton—that was to say, the Wilton of the Gunga silver-mine : what room did all these new impressions leave for other than a vague underlying rejoicing that the thing that mattered most of all, by the side of which Parisian toilettes and friends' welcomes and silvering bridegrooms were indeed but as insignificant and ephemeral dreams, that the thing that mattered beyond all others in the world, was as it ought to be ?

We need not dwell upon the details of Mamy's wedding-breakfast. That it was conducted upon the same free-and-easy principles, or, to speak more correctly, upon the same absence of all principles, as had marked her courtship and marriage, we may at least be certain. The point in which it differed from all other wedding-breakfasts ever heard of lay in the fact that it was the bride who made the speech. She made it, it is true, at the bridegroom's instigation ; or, rather, the cake having been cut and healths having been drunk in the best champagne procurable, she received a small slip of paper from Jack's hands (Jack was sitting next to her, and in this respect only the etiquette of wedding breakfasts was observed), with the request that she would read it out to the assembled company. As the only stranger present was Reginald, and as Reginald had never been a stranger to the Clares, Mamy felt not the least diffidence in doing as she was requested. The writing on the paper was in Jack's hand, and was very easy to decipher. She therefore proceeded to read out loud as follows :

"I, Mamy Wilton " (accompanied by a smile and a blush), "do declare to all here present that I settle from this day forth the sum of five hundred pounds yearly upon my mother for the rest of her natural life, and— oh, Jack, what do you mean ?"

Here the bride cast down the paper and threw herself sobbing upon her husband's breast.

"That's all true," whispered Eila hysterically to Reginald, by whose side she was sitting; she was crying now, in her turn; "it's Jack's surprise to Mamy. She thought he was quite poor. We all thought it at first. No one knew but me. Oh, Reginald, what is mother saying?" She stopped uneasily to listen.

"Am I to look upon this as genuine?" Mrs. Clare was exclaiming in agitated tones. "Oh, my children, and all this because I insisted upon bringing home the portrait of your ancestor!"

There was a pause. The solemn reminder from their mother of the real origin of their astounding fortune caused the younger members of the Clare family to look serious. It was true, nevertheless. If they had not made the great move, there would have been no Hubert, no Jack, no wedding, no brother-in-law to dispense thousands to the family on his marriage day.

When order was a little restored, when Mrs. Clare had walked round the table and fervently embraced her son-in-law and her daughter by turns, when Dick and Willie had shaken hands wildly with everybody in the room, beginning with each other, and Truca had been kissed indiscriminately in her turn, Mamy proceeded to read the rest of the paper:

"I settle upon my sister Eila for her sole use and benefit the sum of three hundred pounds a year," she continued chantingly. "Willie may have a part share in one of my stations if he pleases, and Dick shall have a studio of his own when he has a picture in the Salon. As for Truca, I shall give her a little dowry when she is old enough to marry. I also hope that the family will come and visit Jack and me at Gunga as long and as often as they please, as soon as we have built a house large enough for their accommodation."

Joy, as Eila had already discovered, has its limits as well as grief. She was not sure, indeed, that the capacity for feeling happiness was not more speedily exhausted than the capacity for feeling sorrow. Joy at its best is such an uncertain and vaporous possession that even to affirm that we

hold it is to risk seeing it escape us. It was with the feeling of lassitude that succeeds to strong emotions of whatever description that she saw her sister and Jack drive away a couple of hours later in the brougham that was to convey them to the railway-station. It had been settled that Mr. and Mrs. Wilton should make a halt at Amiens for a couple of days, and go thence *viâ* Calais to England. Eila almost felt now as though she could have paraphrased the words of Simeon, and declared that, having seen the accomplishment of her desires, she was ready to depart this life in peace, the goal of her wildest hopes and ambitions having been reached. Mamy had sailed triumphantly into port, with all her sails set, like some fair and queenly vessel, taking in tow the fleet of unballasted craft that had been so grievously buffeted about by the waves. The poor little vessels were sheltered now from storms and gales. They were securely anchored in a safe haven. Jack had explained to his sister-in-law before going away that she might make herself easy in her mind as to the fulfilment of the promises he had made in Mamy's name. Her mother's allowance, as well as her own, would begin from the first of the current month. Eila had expressed her regret that words for gratitude and delight were so few in the English language. She would have liked to find some expression adequate to the occasion, but this was evidently impossible. Jack had declared himself more than sufficiently thanked, and, in truth, Eila did not know how completely a certain order of eye, to which hers undoubtedly belonged, can convey the notion of gratitude when language fails to express it. Let those who have read the expression in a dog's brown eyes when caressed by his master's hand deny the eloquence of mute gratitude if they can.

It was between four and five in the afternoon when the bride and bridegroom drove away. There had been scant opportunity for talking to Reginald in the interval. His feelings as he realized the incredible fact that the friends he had come to rescue from pauperism were now among the favourites of fortune may be better imagined than described.

Eila acceded to his proposal to take a walk with him in

the Luxembourg Gardens (those gardens that she had so often described to him in her letters) with sober delight.

"Et d'un autre!" said the concierge man to the concierge woman as the pair passed through the *porte-cochère* side by side on their way out. The weather was divine. The heavenly softness of early summer was in the air. As Eila walked next to her tried friend under the dainty foliage that bedecked the Luxembourg elms, her heart was too full for speech. Silently she led him to a bench in a retired spot away from the central avenue where the band was wont to play, and there, with the memory of their last parting upon the moonlit heights of Cowa rising vividly before each of them, they sat them down and spoke as the spirit moved them.

Not immediately, however. Not without a preliminary exchange of inconsequential observations. Often when the heart is feeling most strongly the lips utter some trivial, commonplace phrase.

"Is it not a treat to see the European green after the black gums?" was Eila's demure query.

"Yes," said Reginald in the same calm tones. "Your mother used to say there were no trees in Tasmania, you remember. If she had said there were no leaves it would have been nearer the mark."

There was a pause.

"Fancy mother's prophecies coming true, after all!" remarked Eila.

"Yes; but by what a fluke!" rejoined Reginald.

Something in his voice prompted her to look round at him at that moment with a smile, and the little barrier of conventional custom she had essayed to set up between herself and him crumbled instantly into nothingness.

"Take off your glove," he said huskily, and having done as she was bid, she surrendered her hand to his caressing embrace. After this all that he had to tell her sounded natural enough. The drift of it, in truth, was only the passionate reiteration of the all-absorbing sentiment he had for her. He made no allusion to the subject of her letter. It would have seemed like sacrilege to recall it at this mo-

ment. Nor did he tell her as yet of her husband's death. It was enough at first to try to make her realize, dimly, something of what he had felt when he lost her, and of what he now felt upon finding her again.

Eila listened with her head a little bent forward, her fingers nervously interlacing themselves with his, as her hand rested in his grasp. When he paused she answered him hurriedly, in tones quite unlike those of her usually calm-sounding voice. It was evident that the thing she said cost her an effort to say. "I do believe you care for me with all your heart, Reginald, and I often felt how badly I wanted you by me all this past year. I don't think I am any good by myself, but I *would* be if I were always with you. I believe there must be women who can't take care of themselves—and——"

Her voice quavered. His own had a break in it as he repeated with a sincerity of tone that was almost tragic in its intensity: "My darling! My own darling! Listen, Eila. I have always loved you with a love that seems to me almost superhuman. Whatever selfish thoughts I may have had of appropriating you to myself—and God knows I have had them sometimes—the love I bore you was always strong enough to triumph over the desire in the end. It is simply a matter of caring about you more than about myself. I hope and trust that if it had been still necessary, I should have found the strength now to think of you first—that instead of rushing blindly into the paradise of unlawful love, I should have had the power to pause on the threshold for *your* sake as before. But Eila, my dear one, such a sacrifice is no longer needed. The cause that held us apart has ceased to exist. The week that I left Hobart, your husband died suddenly—quite suddenly, and without suffering—at the asylum."

He heard her utter a gasping "Oh!" as her fingers tightened round his wrist. Then she was silent, but, to his surprise, two tears trickled slowly from beneath her downcast lashes over her cheeks on to the front of her dress. Was it for the poor maniac—the echo of whose unmeaning curses pursued her even now in her dreams—that she was weeping?

Or for the never-to-be re-awakened illusions of her own foolish, passionate youth?

"Tell me about it," she said at last, wiping her eyes, with a long-drawn sigh, as though the tears had relieved her. "I know you kept your promise of seeing him."

"I had seen him only a few days before, dear," Reginald assured her tenderly. "It was a hopeless case, and life would have been only a prolonging of mental and bodily torment. It was a merciful release; believe me——"

He stopped, and she insisted once more: "Tell me all you know."

And Reginald told her. The story was a long one. He had not only to render an account of the manner in which he had fulfilled his trust, but to give details of a hundred things connected with it besides. How he had first learned the news of Charles Frost's death; how on the morrow he had seen the body, which had been conveyed to Hobart for burial, lying in its coffin at Ivy Cottage; how impressed he had been by the peaceful aspect of the clay delivered of the spirit that tortured it; how young and fair the chiselled face had looked (Eila's tears had flowed freely again at this part of the narrative); how the bitterness of the parents' grief had been assuaged by the apparent resuscitation in death of the child they had loved and lost. But when he had recounted all these things, gently and sympathizingly, there remained yet much to be told. How a certain letter Eila had written had rendered it impossible for Reginald himself to remain away from her any longer; how the very evening he had made up his mind to sacrifice everything, and rush across the world to rescue her, he had received the visit by night of her uncle with the news of her husband's death; how, having no knowledge of the relations of the family with Jack Wilton, he had expected to find them all in the direst straits of poverty; how, with her uncle's aid, and having realized a few hundred pounds on his own account, he had come home with the intention of persuading them to let him bring them back to Hobart at all costs, far from the risk of starving in the midst of plenty, and from Macchiavelian hunchback cousins.



"But it is only the unexpected that happens," he concluded, "and certainly the last thing in the world I expected was to find you all rich people. As regards you and me, Eila, if I consulted my own feelings alone, I would ask you not to accept those three hundred pounds your brother-in-law proposes to settle upon you. I would rather have you without a penny in your pocket, or a dress to your back, unless it were a certain washed-out old frock you had on—do you remember?—when you came to wish me good-bye in the moonlight that last night at Cowa. Have you got that dress still? I should like you to keep it, like Enid, for a remembrance. But to go back to the question of the money, my dear. Being a very poor man myself, and your brother-in-law having millions, it seems selfish to want to deprive you of your share of the spoil, though I would rather work sixteen hours a day instead of eight, to be able to feel you owed everything you had to *me*. However, we will not discuss that matter now. You shall do as you like in this and everything else. You can't imagine, my darling, how inestimably precious that avowal was you made me a few moments ago. But now our probation is at an end we need never be separated again. I have enough to keep me for nearly a year at home if I am careful, since the money will not be needed for your family any longer, and by-and-by we can be married somewhere quietly in Europe and go out to settle in Hobart, where my work lies for the present. Are you willing to go there with me, dear, instead of into the wilds, as you offered to do awhile ago?"

"Anywhere with you," Eila replied gravely.

There was nothing to be done for the family now, and the happiness of giving happiness, always the most powerful factor in her case, had never been more strongly appealed to. If Reginald had not cared for her to the extent of making her feel that she was literally conferring paradise on him by giving herself to him, the prospect of marrying a poor man, and of settling in Hobart, might not have been altogether calculated to arouse enthusiasm. But if you create a paradise for another, you cannot fail to enjoy a certain reflected share in it yourself. So she replied gravely, and

with the most entire conviction, both real and apparent, "Anywhere with you," as Reginald repeated his question once more before drawing her arm through his, and walking away with her through the gloaming from the scene of their betrothal.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### CONCLUSION.

SIX weeks had elapsed since Mrs. Wilton's departure. The letters she addressed to her former home had been as unsatisfactory as the letters of a happy bride must of necessity be. The happier she is, the more reticent she becomes. Eila felt vaguely that the Mamy of Cowa was gone away for ever. What the Mrs. Wilton who had taken her place would be like remained yet to be seen.

It was seen when the bride swept into the apartment on the *quatrième* upon a certain warm June afternoon. Eila, who had not expected her for another hour, started back with a momentary pang of non-recognition before opening wide her arms, and rushing forward to clasp them round her neck.

"Mamy, is it you ? Mother and the rest of them are out. We did not think you could be here before six. Where is your husband ?"

"Jack is at the Continental," said Mamy, disengaging herself from her sister's clasp ; "I told him I *must* see you alone for the first half-hour. He will come for me by-and-by."

"Come for you, dear ! What do you mean ? We have ordered a dinner from Foyot's for you here."

"Oh ! Jack thought you would all dine with us at *table d'hôte*, but it shall be as you please, Eila. I didn't remember it was so warm here. How do you exist in such an atmosphere ?"

The tone in which the last words were uttered conveyed the first subtle suggestion, or, rather, apprehension, to Eila's

mind that Mrs. Wilton and Mamy Clare were two different persons. There could be no question as to which was the more imposing of the two. Mamy Clare's personality had been expressed by a torn and washed-out blouse; young Mrs. Wilton's personality was draped in a silk of the "stand-by-itself" consistency, surmounted by a bonnet which resembled a garland of dew-besprinkled forget-me-nots of exquisite fidelity. Eila was sure that the glittering dew-drops were scintillating diamonds. The extreme youth of the wearer of this magnificent apparel was the crowning point of its splendour, for though dress may take twenty years away from a woman's appearance, it is only when there is nothing to take away that it has a clear field for its operations. Eila watched the manner in which Mamy seated herself on the new armchair by the window (for the name of the reception-room was no longer a by-word in the family), and smiled, with a shade of sadness, however, in her smile.

"You are as happy as you expected to be, dear?"

The bride raised her eyebrows—a thing she had never been wont to do in olden times—and Eila felt that this was an attribute of the great lady who had taken Mamy's place.

"I'm all right," she said carelessly. Then, with a deprecating look round the room: "It seems so long ago that I was living here. It's like going back to the Dark Ages to think of it."

"And Jack is good to you?" persisted Eila, kneeling by her sister's side and taking her hand in hers. "Oh, Mamy dear, what *have* you done with your hands to make them so white? And, goodness! What rings! I know now what is meant in books by the heroine's fingers being ablaze with precious stones. Doesn't it tire you to wear so many?"

"I take them off at night," said Mamy, stretching out her hands and looking at her rings critically. "But I was always forgetting them at first. Jack fished them out of the basin at the hotel one time, and another time we missed our train going back for them."

"And what are your plans now?" asked Eila, a little

sadly. "Oh, Mamy dear, I have a confession to make to you."

"About?"

Mamy raised her eyebrows once more. They were pretty brows, and the action of raising them was not unbecoming to the blue orbs they crowned. Nevertheless, the gesture seemed a part of Mrs. Jack Wilton, and not of Mamy Clare.

"About poor Sydney! I could not bear to give you the news just on the eve of your wedding. Jack told you, I suppose?"

"Yes."

Mamy's mouth worked a little, as in her childish days, and the expression was so entirely that of the Mamy that Eila had always known and loved, until a few minutes ago, that she felt emboldened to put her arms around her neck and kiss her.

Nevertheless, the impression that her sister was not altogether the same continued to haunt her. In the old days there was no course of action, however reckless, that Mamy would not have tolerated in theory if her opinion had been asked, and even if it had not been asked. Clearly at this moment did the interview upon the Cowa veranda recur to Eila's mind, when Mamy had declared to her that it was for *her* that Reginald came to Cowa, boasting at the same time of her own knowledge of the world, and the latitude she would allow people who were fond of each other, whether encumbered by matrimonial ties or not, for had she not read Dumas Fils and Balzac?

To verify how far these unconventional views, which certainly could not have resulted from her own experience, had withstood the sobering effect of matrimony in Mamy's case, Eila devised a small fiction as a snare.

"Not to talk about sad things now," she said, in allusion to the reference to Sydney, "there is something about myself I ought to say, Mamy. You were always so liberal when you were a girl—you used to frighten me with your views sometimes—so I need not mind telling you what I am thinking of doing."

"What are you thinking of doing?"

Mamy's face was not encouraging. Its expression was rather one of alarm than approval, and that the alarm was genuine might be divined from the fact that she forgot in putting her question to raise her eyebrows.

"Why"—Eila turned to the window and pretended to be busy in pulling the new blind straight in order to give herself a countenance—"nothing is done so far; but Reginald has come home."

"I know. You haven't forgotten he was at our wedding, have you? I knew he could never stop away from you for long."

"Oh, you knew that?" The blind, having been almost mathematically readjusted, was adroitly disarranged once more. "Well, Mamy, with our way of looking at things now that you are married, and a power in the land, and now that, thanks to your husband, mother and the rest of us are provided for, would you think it very extraordinary if I thought of my own life a little, and Reginald's, and all the years that are slipping away, and of how happy I could make him and myself, if—if we were free?"

"But you're not free," said Mamy, with a resolute air. "If you were it would be different."

"Not free in the eyes of the world, perhaps," rejoined Eila softly, but just as resolutely; "but in my own eyes, and in the eyes of those who know all the circumstances of my life—in those of my family especially—surely I might be considered free. You would have been the first once to say so. We have only one life, and we know nothing about another, or even whether there *is* any other at all. Why should I let this one life be utterly spoiled? Why should I sacrifice myself and another person to a cruel and unjust law, which binds two people together in defiance of all that is just, and right, and natural? I have no children; there is no one whom I can hurt if I make use of the freedom that I consider my right. Tell me, Mamy, would it seem to you a very dreadful thing if, knowing how much Reginald cares for me, I consented to go away with him and live in some quiet, out-of-the-way place, where our comings and goings would matter to nobody? You would care for me,

dear, the same as ever ; and I suppose you would come and see me sometimes, wouldn't you ! ”

“ I, perhaps ; but Jack, and Jack's sisters and his mother ! Oh, Eila, you don't know what people they are ! For pity's sake don't talk about anything so horrible ! And Jack thinks you're the purest woman in the world. He said so—he did indeed. And, oh ! pray—pray—don't talk in that way.”

Mamy was beginning to whimper. Eila answered her in the same soft though resolute tones. “ I should not think I had forfeited my right to be considered a pure woman, Mamy, if I *were* to give up everything for the sake of Reginald. You have a perfect right to change your opinion, but would you have spoken as you are doing now a little time ago ? ”

“ I was a child,” said Mamy, pulling out a dainty piece of brodered cambric and applying it to her eyes. “ I did not know anything of the world. None of us did. If you were to do as you say, I should never be able to visit you. And you can't imagine how *horrified* Jack's family would be. I would never dare to tell him.”

“ And you yourself ? You would disown me, Mamy ? ”

Mrs. Wilton looked at the ground instead of encountering her sister's eyes.

“ You need not do it,” she said at last, with an air of vexation.

“ No, I need not do it, as you say ; and I am not going to do it, either. I only wanted to see whether you held the same views as before. If I were free, you would not be sorry to see me married to Reginald, I suppose ? ”

“ Sorry ! I should be awfully glad, and so would Jack. He liked what he saw of him ever so much.”

“ Then you may be glad, Mamy, for by-and-by I mean to marry Reginald.”

“ You will get a divorce, I suppose ? ” said Mamy in constrained tones. “ I hope to heaven it won't be in the papers, where everyone can read it.”

Eila paused a moment before she replied.

“ No divorce will be necessary. My husband is dead, Mamy.”

She had intended to make this announcement very quietly and solemnly, but there came a break in her voice that she had not reckoned upon. She turned away her head, and Mamy said nothing for a time. Then she got up, threw her arms round her sister's neck, and held her close to her heart.

"Dear, poor Eila! I did not know anything about how wives feel, whatever their husbands may do or become, until I got married myself. Poor Eila, darling! But you will be very happy by-and-by with Reginald. Try to think of that most if you can."

"Yes I will," said Eila, sobbing hysterically, and clinging to her sister with fervent clasp. She felt after this that Mamy had come back again, despite the rings, the diamonds, and the white hands.

It was more apparent than ever that she had come back when a few minutes later, notwithstanding her rings and circumstance, the bride was indiscriminately hugged by the remaining members of her family. Plans were discussed and the programme of the future drawn up that evening, in the wake of a family banquet at the Continental. Jack, who did the honours, proved himself so much more apt for the rôle of an adoring husband and an affectionate son-in-law than for that of an amateur pupil in French, that Mrs. Clare expressed her contrition at not having recognised his true vocation before. To give the crowning touch to Eila's most elaborate air-castle, and to render it a solid and dazzling reality, he proposed to treat the family to the Continental tour that had been for so long the object of their hopes and dreams. The offer, it is needless to say, was rapturously accepted. There was one person, however, who, although he was included in the invitation, would not be beholden to Mamy's silver-king husband. This person was Reginald. Despite the almost insurmountable desire of watching over young Mrs. Frost until such time as he could keep her for ever by his side, he was heroic enough to declare his intention of returning to his post in Tasmania. His decision was warmly combatted by the entire party, save Eila, who maintained an inexplicable silence. But her lover

must have been more than satisfied by the protest he read in her eyes, for as soon as he was alone with her on their homeward way along the boulevards, he spent himself in explanations—unnecessary enough—of the motives for which he renounced the immense joy of accompanying her on her travels. Tenderness for her reputation; a certain sense of pride on his own account, which made it impossible for him to accept benefits from a stranger; the very strength and passion of his adoration for her—these were the considerations which impelled him to sacrifice the present to the future. So eloquent he was in arguing against his own desire, so evidently fearful lest she should persuade him against his better judgment to remain, that for once Eila was strong. She did not put her arms round his neck and say “Stay”—or, rather, she did the first, but said “Go”—and both he and she felt that they had taken a step upon the path of renunciation, which would have advanced them a long way towards the Nirvana of the Buddhists. They fortified themselves by dwelling upon the vision of the home that Reginald would prepare for their joint occupation in Tasmania, upon the possibility of their renting Cowa, upon the joy of meeting again in Melbourne, whither Reginald intended to go to meet her in eight months’ time, and upon the question of where the marriage ceremony would be quietly performed. There was only one terror that haunted Reginald, and he confided it to his betrothed. What if the hunchback cousin should reappear upon the scene?

“What—Hubert! Oh, he will never come back!” said Eila confidently. “I have a feeling sometimes that he wasn’t a real person at all, only a shade we evoked from the nether world by our determination to discover the owner of the ruby. If he *should* come our way again, I will run away to you directly.”

But Eila was right, for Hubert was not heard of again.

THE END.



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